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THE HISTORY  
OF  
STEELE CREEK CHURCH,

MECKLENBURG, N. C.

COMPILED AND WRITTEN

BY REV. JOHN DOUGLAS.

COLUMBIA, S. C.  
PRINTED AT THE PRESBYTERIAN PUBLISHING HOUSE

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## STEELE CREEK CHURCH.

"The word History (*ἱστορία*) has in its Greek original two significations, viz., the acquisition of knowledge by research or inquiry, and the narration of events, real or supposed." It has been defined to be, "The narration of real events, intended for the instruction and amusement of mankind."

Cicero says: "History is the light of truth." It is manifest that an untrue history is no history at all, but a fable; and all the more pernicious, because it assumes the garb of truth. The love of truth, as truth, is the first duty of the historian; but it is not his whole duty. What is essential to the truth of history is, that the narrator should have it clearly before his own mind. "It is difficult for us to get rid of the impression, in the reading of history, that we are perusing an exact account of events as they really happened, without exaggeration or diminution, without suppression or addition." *History*, viewed as a science, is the methodical narration of events in the order in which they successively occurred, exhibiting the beginning and progress, the causes and effects, and the auxiliaries and tendencies of that which has occurred. It is a fact, well established by a knowledge of the past, that States, and even small communities, have their meridian and decline. The great object of history is, not only to keep up a recollection of the things that are past, but to furnish a faithful record of the failures or successes of those who have gone before, for the benefit of those who are, and are yet to come.

"Make former times shake hands with latter,  
And that which was before, come after."

Why do men carve the marble, erect monuments of brass and granite, or try to put life into canvass, but to defeat the forgetfulness of man? Time, in the rapidity of its flight,



soon wipes out, or puts its extinguisher upon all the present. It soon sweeps away the materials of history, and history itself. How true as D'Israeli has written: "Every human institution is accompanied by its silent corruption, and the meridian of its excellence is only touching the first gradations of its decline." *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

IN writing church history, or even the history of a single church, we must not presume to supply by the force of imagination the deficiencies of ancient or reliable annals, nor venture to adopt mere conjecture or tradition, as the most reliable, undisputed facts. To receive upon conjecture, of conjecture there is no end. *Tradition*, "the secret witness of time," as it has been called, bestows the life of memory on the forgotten, consigns to us the unwritten records of our race. In the strictest sense of the word, it means the delivery of a statement by a first witness to a second, by a second to a third, and so on, no one witness having any authority, except that which he derives from the one immediately preceding. It is the successive delivery of a fact from one person or generation to another. "It casts," says D'Israeli "a light in the deep night of the world; but, in remote ages, it is like the pale and uncertain moonlight, which may deceive us by flitting shadows rather than indeed show the palpable forms of the truth." *Tradition* at every remove of time, the weaker is its evidence. "As recollection becomes fainter, the receiver of traditions supplies by imperfect suggestions, or misconceives by his own inadvertence. Thus (Thucydides complains) "the search after truth is considered by many persons an intolerable labor, and they, therefore, too often take up with such accounts as are at hand merely to save themselves trouble." Hence, by following "the traditions of men," instead of "the law and testimony," how many hurtful and grievous errors have some writers or historians fallen into? Where the law and testimony are forthcoming, tradition is of little value. Among all nomadic and unlettered tribes or clans, tradition is the most common channel of preserving and transmitting their genealogies, or of retaining the growth, and conquests, and strength of their people.



In the absence of all written documents, this is the only alternative, and its adoption is a necessity. Yet, is it not strange that in a community like this, so long distinguished for its intelligence, patriotism, its moral and religious privileges, and we might say, living within sight of the very birthplace of our national independence, we should *now* be compelled to glean and gather up of the *dissecta membra*, collect from the broken "chain of traditions," materials, out of which to compile and make up the history of Steele Creek church? one among the oldest and largest churches in the State. "Would you see," says Foote in his sketches of North Carolina, "the records of Steele Creek church? She has no history." This we are unwilling to concede. He might, however, with propriety have said, she is a church with a history, but destitute of any *written* records for *fourscore years* of her existence. "Tell it not in Gath"! With no written records of the church, no State archives to draw from, and the story of tradition well-nigh ceased to be told, and where there are few, very few, to "ask now of the days which are past," must we, from this chaos, this debris of expired generations, or by raking into the ashes of our deceased progenitors, undertake to collect and make out a full and complete history of our church; almost as well might we undertake, out of a heap of graveyard dust, to find out the particles that once composed the bodies of our great grand-sires. Much as has passed beyond the reach of recovery what we ever knew, still we undertake the work with the hope that *all* is not lost.

It is not the *vanitas scriptorum*; nor any impulse like that of Walpole, of whom it is said that he always wrote "with a view to posthumous celebrity;" nor from the mere gratification—"Tis pleasant sure to see one's name in print;" nor is it with any such febrile feelings, as Dr. J. A. Alexander (Vol. II. of his life, page 699,) once wrote his brother, were tormenting him—"I am suffering for want of a book to write, being paralyzed by the infirmity of choice."—No such feelings or motives influence us, or start our pen. We write for the benefit of "the tribes that go up"—those who "encamp





about the tabernacle" "and worship at his holy hill;" and notwithstanding the "*penuria testium*," we will try and bring to light hidden things, and thus preserve the history of the church from utter oblivion. In the prosecution of our task, we shall be compelled to collect our information, in part, from the grave-stones of our dead, from the feeble voice of tradition still audible, and from such other sources as shall be well substantiated by circumstantial and corroborating testimony. We are not to judge of the past by what we now see, nor think that there always existed an organised and flourishing church at this place, nor that there was not a time when the missionary had not to come here from afar and sow the seed, and with toil and patience cultivate this moral waste, sustained in his work almost entirely by foreign aid.

#### STEELE CREEK CHURCH

Is situated in the western portion of Mecklenburg County, N. C., eight miles west of Charlotte, and about three miles, in a direct line, from the Catawba River, on the east side of the road leading from the Tuckasege Ford, in the direction of Camden, S. C., and running almost parallel with the river. "At one time Anson County embraced all the western portion of the State, from New Hanover and Bladen on the east, as far as the State extended on the west, more than one-half of the State."\* In 1762, Mecklenburg County was formed from Anson County, and called in honor of the new queen, Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg. The county seat of Mecklenburg is Charlotte, which took its name from the following circumstance: "King George III. made choice of a consort of the Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg Strelitz; when the time came to consummate his wishes, the Earl of Harcourt was fixed upon to go out as an ambassador plenipotentiary, to make the demand of her serene highness; the Duchesses of Ancaster and Hamilton, and the Countess of Effingham, were appointed ladies of the bed-chamber to take care of her person,"† the yacht in

\*Wheeler, p. 21.

†Hume, Vol. IV., p. 36.



which the party were to sail, and bring back the king's treasure, was called *Caroline*; but in honor to her Highness it was changed into Charlotte. So the county seat of Mecklenburg, N. C., took its name in honor of the same royal personage.

The church takes its name from the circumstance of its being situated on the head waters of a small stream of the same name. At what precise period, or by whom, the gospel was first preached at Steele Creek, "*hoc, non videtur mihi satis certum*;" but from "*fragmenta veterum*," and the most authentic information we can glean from all other reliable sources, we conclude the church was organised as early as 1760. But it is very evident there had been occasional preaching at this place, or in this neighborhood, for many years anterior to this. The whole community were in the habit of assembling together under the widespread branches of some forest oak. In the course of time they obtained a small piece of land (not exceeding two acres) from a Mr. Brownfield, or *Brunfield* as he was more commonly called, whether as a purchase or donation we have no means of determining, as our title (if we ever had one) is lost; on this they erected a plain log-house of the roughest material, some thirty paces east of the road, and with the true instincts of the Scotch-Irish, their next act was to lay off, near by it, a burying-place for their dead. *Tradition* requires we should give this latter act the precedence in our history. It says, the first person buried here was a stranger, who passing through the country was, near this, thrown from his horse against a tree and killed. This grave is without a name or date---

"We carved not a line, we raised not a stone,  
But left him alone"-----

"and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." How long since this grave was made, or the first interment took place here, we have no means of determining with certainty. The oldest grave we find marked among our dead, dates back to 1763. Others were doubtless buried here some years previous to this. Here for generations the



inhabitants of this whole region of country have brought their dead to bury them out of sight; it is now the chosen resting-place of a large congregation. Doubtless many more sleep beneath its dust, than walk round about its walls. This city of the dead is densely studded over with grave-stones, alike the memorials of the dead, and tributes of respect from the living. The more ancient of them are made of soap-stone of antique appearance, and mostly standing upright with short inscriptions; nothing eulogistic—only the name, age, and date of death—nothing more. On many of them will be seen, above the inscription, a face with a wing coming out on each side. The design of these emblems was doubtless imported by these first settlers from the country whence they came. The author of "Mary Powell," and "Household of Sir Thomas Moore," tells us that the face with wings, so common in the graveyards of England, is the ancient symbol of immortality.

This circumstance will doubtless arrest the attention even of a stranger on entering this quiet resting-place of the dead, viz., the striking similarity, or remarkable equality, that characterise all our head-stones. As a general rule, we believe the monuments in a graveyard may be considered as fair an index of the former social and worldly equality or differences among the dead, as the style of houses among the living. Wherever you find costly and elegant mansions for the living, there you will find proud monuments or towering obelisks rising aloft to mark the graves of the mighty dead. Do away with the idea of nobility of birth, or pride of wealth, among the living, and you will bring down every thing to the same plebian level among the monuments of the dead. The first graveyard was enclosed with a post and rail fence, which in a few years decayed, when it was enclosed with a substantial stone wall, with an iron gateway. In the order of priority, we have no doubt the dead found a grave among us, before the living had erected a house of worship. The first building was put up without the skill of an architect to draft the plan. There was no king, like Hiram, to raft the goodly cedars from Lebanon; neither did it go up without the



sound of axe. It may, like Solomon's carriage, have been paved with love; but had no silver pillars or coverings of purple.

Originally the lands around Steele Creek were fertile and valuable. The inhabitants, from their earliest settlements, were characterised for their industry, patriotism, and morality, ever manifesting a due respect for the ordinances of the gospel, and the worship of the sanctuary. It is more than probable that the Rev. Hugh McAden, in his missionary tours, passed through and preached in this community as early as 1755 or '56, and was afterwards succeeded by the Rev. Elihu Spencer and Robert McMordie, and others, who frequently traversed this region of country, in their abundant labors, together with many other points in their wide and destitute missionary field. We can readily conceive that the general aspect of things, the face of nature, and the state of society were very different then from what they are now. Think of this whole section of country as one unbroken, uncultivated forest, which had long been the home and undisputed hunting grounds of the red-men of the forest. Its virgin soil had been but little disturbed by the rude implements of the pioneer husbandman. No market roads intersected its hills; no barren fields or red clay hills worn into gullies; no noise of mills were heard on the water courses; no railroad whistle aroused the sleeper from his morning repose. Everywhere the quiet of Sabbath seemed to prevail. Nought to disturb it, but the woodman's axe, or the sharp crack of the huntsman's rifle. The honey bee had not then found its hive; nor was the quail seen following in the footsteps of civilisation. The wolf and deer roamed at large, with almost none to molest or make afraid. The white inhabitants, then, "were few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it."

The early settlers of this section were nearly all of *Scotch-Irish* descent. "SCOTCH-IRISH, is a good explanatory term; but, perhaps, not properly understood by one in a thousand. It does not necessarily mean a mixture of Scottish and Irish blood; but a correct definition of it would be this: The Scotch who have come







through Ireland to America. The term, Scotch-Irish, is only used in this country. In the North of Ireland, the population is mainly descended from the Scotch and English; there the usual distinction for Protestant and Catholic, is Scotch and Irish. The former is the synonym for Protestant, and the latter the invariable epithet for Catholic or Papist.\* The Scotch-Irish are the Puritans of the South—the Blue Stockings of all countries. These emigrants usually came to this country through two avenues or routes. The one, by the Delaware River, whose chief port was Philadelphia; and the other, by a more Southern landing, the port of Charleston, South Carolina. Those who landed at Charleston, usually followed up the rivers, till they ascended above the malaria regions, when they pitched their tent by some cool spring, in the head-lands or mountain regions; while those who landed in Philadelphia, tarried perhaps a few years in the western part of that State, then emigrated again for the more temperate climate of Virginia or the Carolinas; after transcending the mountains, they followed down the streams till they met the flood-tide of the up-current, when, from a common sympathy, or national idiosyncrasy, or speaking the same vernacular, or a still stronger reason, from being educated in the same religious creed, they readily coalesced, and formed the same society and worshipping assemblies. This latter was the magnet which drew them together and bound them more firmly than any thing else. After landing in the New World, many of these homeless exiles journeyed in their migrations, with staff in hand, with no finger-board to point their course, or chart to direct them to their future home; but the providence of God, when these pilgrims and strangers had crossed this Jordan, guided them through the midst of this wild forest, till they lifted up their wondering eyes, and said, "Hitherto the Lord hath brought us, here we will erect our Ebenezer." All nature then made for them one capacious temple of God. Like the patriarch Jacob, they soon set up their altar; they sung the Lord's song in a strange land, and

\* Quigg.



caused the wilderness to rejoice; made the hills resound and the valleys echo "with their songs of praise and hymns of lofty cheer." Their settlements were few and far between—all living in the plainest style, in houses of rudest structure, and dressing somewhat in native costume. There were then no broadcloth coats, and few fur hats to be seen in any assembly. We were then a British province, deriving our life-blood from a centre far removed from us. In these times there were few churches or places of preaching in all the land; and there were still fewer preachers to break to the people the bread of life. Those who did attempt to feed the scattered flock "came from afar" and had to be supported almost entirely by foreign aid, the citizens themselves being able to contribute very little towards defraying their expenses. These early missionaries travelled over these hills, by the Indian traders' paths, to the homes of those who had settled amid the forests of the Catawba, where they took sweet counsel, and went in company, by bridle-paths, to their log-church or other place prepared for public worship. There were then no buggies or carriages in all the land. When we turn off our eyes from beholding these things, and contemplate the scenes by which we are now surrounded, have we not cause to bless God, and revere the memories of those who "remembered us in our low estate," brought us up, and put a new song in our mouth, even praise unto our God." As we have freely received, so freely should we give. It would only then be the benefice of grateful beneficiaries.

Having settled the time when Steele Creek church was organised, as satisfactorily as the "tradition of the elders," and the dry bones of chronology will enable us, we now, with the dim lights before us, and very few written records to aid us, will endeavor to trace up the history of this church, from the year 1760 to our own times. In entering upon such a task, while we utterly despair of accomplishing all we could wish, yet we hope at least to glean and preserve a few handfuls of what those who have gone before have dropped of purpose for us. For many years our only authentic source of reliable information will be from "The Records of



the Synod of New York and Philadelphia." Here it may not be out of place to state, for the information of some, that at first, and prior to the organisation of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in the United States was composed of a single Presbytery, viz., Philadelphia, consisting at its organisation in 1706 of only *seven* ministers and their churches, and this continued the only advisory and governing body till 1717. The church had then so increased, it was determined to sub-divide the existing body into at least three other Presbyteries, which were to constitute a Synod, which should meet annually. Thus the Synod of Philadelphia was formed in 1717, and continued to be the chief judicatory of the Church till 1741, when a division took place in the Synod, owing to a diversity of sentiment among its members, called "Old and New Sides." It was then divided into two co-ordinate bodies, called the Synod of Philadelphia, and the Synod of New York. These two separate bodies continued till 1758, when the two were formed into one Synod, called "The Synod of New York and Philadelphia." This continued till 1788, when this Synod was divided into *four* Synods, viz.: New York and New Jersey, Philadelphia, Virginia, and the Carolinas—out of these were formed the General Assembly, which met for the first time in Philadelphia, May 21st, 1789, and was opened with a sermon by Rev. John Witherspoon, D. D., after which the Rev. John Rodgers, D. D., was elected the first Moderator; and from that to the present continues to be the highest court in the Presbyterian Church.

For a number of years after Steele Creek church was organised, it had to be sustained and kept alive by the same means with which it was brought into existence by missionary efforts and supplies from abroad. This and adjacent churches organised about the same time, no doubt enjoyed the occasional labors of the Rev. Messrs. Craighead, Martin, and Richardson, in addition to what the Rev. Hugh McAden did for them. In 1761, we learn from the Minutes of Synod. supplies were asked for Southern vacancies, and as this petition was intended specially to cover this section of country, we infer they were sent. The Rev. Mr. Caldwell, of the





Synod of New York, applied for the appointment to North Carolina, which appointment he received, and as soon as possible, set out on the journey. Thus from year to year supplies were sought, and no doubt sent. In 1764, several applications from North Carolina were made, praying for supplies; that same year the Rev. Charles Jeff. Smith was sent; and that year also the Synod knowing the condition of many of the congregations in North Carolina, of their wishing to be properly organised and have their boundaries defined, did appoint the Rev. Elihu Spencer and Alexander McWhorter to go as missionaries, to organise churches and adjust certain boundaries, which duty they performed—the Synod defraying their expenses. Among these churches were included Hopewell, Centre, Providence, and some say, Steele Creek; but we claim an earlier date for the organisation of this church. In 1765, application for supplies were sent to the Synod from the inhabitants living betwixt the waters of the Yadkin and Catawba Rivers, and particular mention was made for the services of Messrs. Spencer and McWhorter, showing they had labored here among them before. And the same year *calls* were prepared for Mr. McWhorter, from Hopewell and Centre churches, but for certain reasons were not then presented to him.

It will be remembered, when the Rev. Alexander Craighead ended his successful labors (in March, 1766), he was the solitary minister between the Yadkin and Catawba; from this time there was no settled minister, for some years, south of the Yadkin. In 1766, the Rev. Nathan Kerr, from New York Presbytery; George Duffield and Robert McMorrie, of the Presbytery of Donegal, and David Calwell, were appointed by Synod to go and supply the destitutions in North Carolina. Their subsequent report shows that they complied with the appointment. The same year (1766) a *call* for the settlement of Mr. Kerr among them was brought in from Steele Creek and New Providence. At the same time another *call* was sent up from Sugar Creek and Rocky River churches, and also another from Centre and Hopewell, for the pastoral labors of Mr. Kerr; but we find in their report to the Presbytery of New York, at the meeting





of the Synod the year following, Mr. Kerr gave a negative answer to the *calls* from Carolina previously put in his hands by order of Synod.

THE FIRST PASTOR, THE REV. ROBERT HENRY.

It was during this year Steele Creek church did call and secure the pastoral labors of the Rev. Robert Henry, of Donegal Presbytery, as their first pastor. He was doubtless sent out with the first missionaries who came to this part of the country, though there is no record of the fact. His labors in this church were brief. For we find it recorded in the Minutes of Synod, Rev. Robert Henry departed this life 8th of May, 1767. He was not permitted to labor more than one year in this his new field. Foote says, (p. 415): "In 1767, the Rev. Robert Henry, the first settled pastor on Cub Creek, Charlotte County, Virginia, having left his charge in Virginia, accepted a call from Steele Creek, and Providence church. In the mysterious Providence of God, he closed his life that year." Of his origin, age, time of licensure, we know nothing; except, he was a member of Hanover Presbytery when it was set off in 1755. His grave is not with us! he sleeps among his former friends in Virginia. His name does not appear on the Minutes of the Presbytery till the year of his appointment.

Who were the elders elected at that time, and associated with Mr. Henry in the government of the church, we have no means of determining certainly. Their names *tradition* has forgotten, and are not to be found on any written records to which we have had access. The first *bench* of elders of whom we find any account, (and it is not probable they run back so far; some of them may have been elected during Mr. Henry's time, or very shortly after,) were, William Barnett, Walter Davis, Robert Irwin, Hugh Parks, David Freeman, Joseph Swann, Zaccheus Wilson, and Andrew McNeely.

After the death of Mr. Henry, for several years, there is in our history a "*hiatus maxime deplendus.*" From the year 1767, till the *call* and settlement of the Rev. James McRee (1778), we do not find that Steele Creek church had



any settled minister or stated supply among them, unless they were supplied by the Rev. Thomas Reese, for a few years, in connection with Providence church. His stay could not have been long. He did not die among us. His bones lie in the graveyard of the "*Stone Church*," Pendleton, S. C. We find, however, in 1767, missionary appointments were made for the destitute congregations in this region. That same year, the Synod appointed Rev. Andrew Bay, Elam Potter, John McCreary, Joseph Alexander, James Latta, Jr., Thomas Jackson, Josiah Lewis, and Anderson, to spend a half-year and more, if advisable, among the churches in Virginia and the Carolinas. We judge from subsequent reports, and other circumstantial and corroborating evidence, that these appointments were generally filled. One fact which goes to confirm this impression is, that the next year (1768) it is recorded, that an application from Steele Creek and Providence churches, in Mecklenburg, N. C., for supplies, was brought in and read, especially for Messrs. Josiah Lewis, John McCreary, or Elam Potter, *i. e.*, for one or either of them to come, and to continue some time with them in order to a settlement. This circumstance in itself goes to show that these ministers must have labored previously among them, and from this fact they were enabled to single out, and desire either one of them to become their pastor. Such a selection could only have resulted from their previous labors among them. For the years 1769 and '70, we find no report of the church, or of any supplies they had, unless some one of the above-named ministers remained with them, which we think most probable from the following facts:

In 1771, application from Steele church, N. C., was brought in and read to Synod for supplies, and, particularly, requesting the labors of the Rev. Josiah Lewis. At the same session, a *call* from the united congregations of Briar Creek and Queensborough, in Georgia, was brought in and read, requesting the labors of Rev. Josiah Lewis. We presume, however, he declined to accept either of these *calls*, from the fact that the same year the Rev. Elam Potter was ordered to spend six months in the churches of



southern North Carolina, to preach and catechise the children; also, the same year (1771) the Rev. Joseph Smith was appointed to visit the southern vacancies, and directed particularly to spend *five* weeks at Steele Creek.

In 1772, the Synod appointed two licentiates of the New Brunswick Presbytery, viz., Messrs. Simpson and Wallace, to supply the destitutions in North Carolina for six months, and as much longer as they could conveniently. From this time, there is again an hiatus—an ominous silence in our history; we are fast drifting on to an eventful crisis. A storm-cloud is gathering dark and thick around the horizon; the feeble, unsettled church seems drifting on the wings of a tornado towards a fatal cataract. Evils, grievous to be borne, and sternly resisted, soon culminated in the American Revolution.

During these troublous times, when the struggle was for life and liberty, there were few engaged in building up the walls of Zion, or permitted to attend public worship; then, like the Jews, every one wrought with one hand, and with the other held a weapon. They were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd; and, while the storm lasted, in all probability very seldom met together as a worshipping congregation. But no sooner had the waters subsided, and the dove returned with the olive branch, than these scattered members began once more to come “bone to his bone;” the long-abandoned temple of God was again swept out; neighbor met neighbor, and they took sweet counsel and went to the house of God in company. As the flood doubtless produced a wonderful change on the face of nature, and disturbed the existing relations of things; so we can readily conceive so long and fierce a war would most seriously disturb, if not completely break up all Church organisations, as well as the social relations that had existed among men. During its prevalence, was strictly a period of non-intercourse betwixt this section and the more northern regions of our country. Those who would pass hence could not. It was a complete blockade against the southern portion of the Church attending any of the meetings of the Synod, north. This circumstance may account, in part, for



the silence as to any applications our vacancies may have made to Synod for supplies or for aid of any sort. This will account for the fact, that from 1772 to 1775, very little is said as to what this church did in the way of petitioning for supplies or to obtain a pastor. When the troubled waters had subsided, the church of Steele Creek did not say like Judah of old, "the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall." No; they washed their hands, and so encompassed God's altar. Many of the Steele Creek congregation had been engaged in this fearful struggle for their altars and firesides; and some of her members,—yes, of her elders,—by their faithful service, earned for themselves a fame, which every patriot son or successor may well be proud of and desire to keep alive. There is no portion of the State whose early record presents a more glowing page of patriotism and valor than Mecklenburg, of which Steele Creek is a component part, we would not say, "*magna pars fuit.*" The character of her people was early shown. It may very justly be called the birth-place of our national independence. For in the town of Charlotte, the county seat of Mecklenburg, on the 20th of May, 1775, the patriots of Mecklenburg assembled in Convention at the same time that the first Provincial Congress of North Carolina was in session in Hillsboro, and the Continental Congress was in session in Philadelphia, consulting for the welfare of the Colonies. This noble little band of patriots "assembled at a period of doubt, of darkness, and of danger, without concert with other States" (this State had already driven away her governor) "and now, without any assurances of support from any other quarter, did there dissolve the political bands which connected them with the mother country, declared themselves a free and independent people;" and set up a government of their own—this, more than a year in advance of the *Fourth of July Declaration*, (1776), from which we are accustomed to date as being the birthday of our national independence. Of this noble deed, as has well been





said :\* "No inscriptions or tablatures, less broad than the earth itself can carry the information where it has not gone." Of whom was that Convention composed? What the character and principles of the men who drafted and adopted this immortal document? It was not the offspring of any momentary excitement, or delirium of affected patriotism, but it was the natural off-shoot of their religious creed. Of the twenty-seven members who composed that Convention, nine or ten of them were ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church, and two of these (Col. Robert Irwin and Zaccheus Wilson) were from Steele Creek. These members were selected from the seven churches of Mecklenburg, which, like the seven churches of Asia, were then the chief centres of influence in all this region of country. The names of these two will be found appended to the Declaration of Independence. Col. Irwin not only took an active part in this Convention, but exhibited the same zeal in attending all the meetings subsequently appointed for carrying it out. On April 4th, 1776, when the Mecklenburg "Memorial Association" sent a committee of three to the General Assembly of the State, then in session at Halifax, to incorporate "The Mecklenburg Monumental Association," Col. Robt. Irwin was appointed one of the three. And when delegates of the State met at Halifax, Nov. 12, 1776, to form the Constitution, Col. Robt. Irwin and Zaccheus Wilson were both members of that Convention. And we find, by reference to the State records between the years 1778 and 1800, that during that time (twelve years) Col. Irwin served as member of the General Assembly from Mecklenburg County. Of Col. Irwin's private and official character as a ruling elder in the church, we will speak more particularly hereafter.

In Charlotte was located the first academy or high school in the upper part of the State, and there was made the first effort for a college in North Carolina in the institution called "Queen's Museum." In 1770 a charter was obtained from

\*Wheeler, p. 259, Vol. II.



the Provincial Assembly to incorporate this institution. But the charter not receiving the royal sanction, was amended and again passed. In 1771 it was repealed by the King. But it flourished without a charter, and in 1777 it was incorporated by the General Assembly of the State, by the more patriotic name of "Liberty Hall." The Rev. Alexander McWhorter was chosen President of this institution.

The inhabitants in and around Charlotte were greatly detested, and even dreaded by the British officers. Tarleton said they were more hostile to England than any others in America. From this "Hornet's Nest," as Cornwallis styled it, there were many dangers to be apprehended; so his minions had to go in and out in the most cautious manner. Here these Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, whose parents had been driven by persecution from their native land, with a spirit of patriotism and independence planted the school-house, the church, and the flag of liberty. The spirit and effect of these early and noble efforts to promote the morals and the intelligence of the people, not only laid the foundation, but contributed to mould the character and to elevate the people of Mecklenburg to the high and honorable rank of citizenship they occupy to-day. During the war many pernicious exotics were imported, and noxious seed sown broadcast over the land, which required the labor of years to extirpate. The sediments formed from the drift-wood, and accumulated rubbish of war, are sure to generate noxious exhalations—a malarial atmosphere, alike infectious to sound morals, and pernicious to every vestige of religious principle. "The battle between the crown and the people had been fought, and the people were victorious. During this long night of darkness, the enemy had come in and sown the tares. Infidelity with a brazen front, was defiant, and threatened like an avalanche to overrun the whole country, to extinguish the best hopes of man—yes, threatened the annihilation of the Church, and the ruin of her Lord's authority. Hence arose the discussion about the dominion of conscience—what should govern conscience, philosophy, or the Bible? At this time, the authority of the Bible un-



derwent a sifting discussion, such as Carolina had never seen, and may never see again.

Debating societies formed for political purposes were common in those days. In and through these, infidelity often fiercely assailed the truth of the Bible. One of these societies was formed in the region of country embracing a part of Sugar Creek, and Steele Creek, and Providence, and furnished a circulating library, replete with infidel philosophy and infidel sentiments on religion and morality. Everything of a religious nature was called in question and discussed, and the standard of opposition was raised with a boldness becoming a better cause. Against these furious assaults, the Rev. Joseph Caldwell of Sugar Creek, and James Wallace of Providence, brothers in the ministry, and sons-in-law of John McKnitt Alexander,\* not only lifted up a standard, but stood as a break-water against this flood-tide of immorality, and by their discussions, preaching, and moral influence, did much to repel it, and to purify the morals and establish the religious principles of the people.

SECOND PASTOR—THE REV. JAMES M'REE.

After so long a digression, we will now fall back more directly on the line of our history. Hitherto we have been "travelling in a dubious road," and "in wandering mazes lost." Now we have crossed the mountains, and head lands are beginning to open up before us. The long and furious storm of the Revolutionary war is over, and the troubled waters have subsided, so man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor again. The effects of the "war on the state of our church were extensively and variously disastrous." "The young men were exposed to the demoralising atmosphere of the camp, congregations were broken up, churches were burnt, and in more than one instance pastors were murdered. From these effects it took it a considerable time to recover." This community and congregation bore its full share in these evils.

For two or more years after the storm lulled, we do not

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\*Foote, p. 248.



find that this church had any regular or stated supplies till 1778. They may have had, and doubtless did have, some occasional supplies. About this time, James McRee, a licentiate of Orange Presbytery, (and not of Concord, as Dr. Foote incorrectly states), was invited, in 1778, to supply Steele Creek church; which invitation he accepted, and immediately entered on his labors. Orange Presbytery was organised in 1700, and the Presbytery of South Carolina was set off from Orange in 1784, and met for the first time at Waxhaw church in April, and was opened with a sermon by the Rev. James Edmunds. It was again divided, when Concord Presbytery was set off from it, but this was not till the year 1795. It held its first meeting at Centre church, on the last Tuesday of March, 1796, and the Rev. James Wallace was appointed to preach and preside till a Moderator be chosen. This being eighteen years after Mr. McRee commenced preaching, he could not have been licensed by Concord Presbytery. While this may have been a mere *lapsus penne* of Dr. Foote, it is worthy of correction. We would also point out another error, into which both Drs. Foote and Sprague have fallen, in case the minutes of Synod are correct, or to be relied on. The former states, "In April, 1778, James McRee was licensed by Concord Presbytery to preach the gospel: and in the November following, he was settled in his own house in Steele Creek congregation, as pastor of the church, having been united in marriage to Rachel Cruser of Mapleton, New Jersey." Dr. Sprague says, "The Rev. James McRee was licensed by the Presbytery of Orange in April, 1778, and became pastor of the congregation of Steele Creek, in Mecklenburg county, in September following." It will be seen by referring to the minutes of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, 1784, that Orange Presbytery in making their report to Synod that year, reported that they had ordained Mr. James McRee and installed him in the congregation of Steele Creek. We find it difficult to reconcile these discrepancies. This is not all. It will be found Mr. McRee was a member of Orange Presbytery in 1778, and duties were assigned him under a resolution of the first General





Assembly, 1789, which a licentiate would not have been competent to perform. The only solution we can give of these differences, at all satisfactory to our own mind, is this: Orange Presbytery may not have been represented, or they made no report to Synod, for the several previous years; and this supposition is the more probable, as it will be seen from the minutes, they were not represented during the greater part of this time. There is no doubt as to the fact, Mr. McRee did commence his labors at Steele Creek, in 1778, and that he continued there till 1797, as stated supply or pastor. He resided some two miles southwest of the church. He was regarded as a faithful and very acceptable pastor. Though during the whole of his ministry among this people, we hear of nothing like what would be called a revival in our day, yet the church gradually increased, and was strengthened under his labors.

It was during his time, it was found necessary to enlarge the old church. As before stated, this house was located some thirty paces east of the public road, leading from the Tuckesege ford on the Catawba River, towards Camden, S. C. Its timbers were of the roughest material. It was neither ceiled with cedar, nor painted with vermilion—nor did it go up without the sound of axe or hammer. The neighbors all turned out, as members of one joint stock company, and with their own hands procured the materials from the adjacent forest, and without the aid of an architect, put up a plain, square log-house, in which for years they congregated for the worship of God, and where his praises sounded as sweetly, and the preached word was as attentively and profitably listened to, as by those “who dwell in their ceiled houses.” After the lapse of some years, owing to the fertility of the lands and the established moral character of the inhabitants, and, perhaps, more especially to the fact that they had a settled pastor, who stately dispensed to them the means of grace, such was the increase of population, and attendance upon the public worship, that their building was found insufficient to accommodate the congregation. They determined not to pull down; but to build larger, to lengthen their cords, and



strengthen their stakes. And they did it! To give a graphic description of this nondescript *improved* building, would require more architectural knowledge than we profess to possess. It was neither Gothic nor Doric, it may have been *Eric*. It might have been called an octagon without having eight equal sides. The walls were extended longitudinally, united by short offsets, disjunctives or hyphens, whether intended as *prefixes* or *suffixes*, we cannot say, the renovated edifice being in every particular *sui generis*, looked as if it must have been built when symmetry and beauty of architecture were considered deadly sins. It was certainly free from all idolatrous imputations, being unlike to "anything in the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth." But it served its day. And strange to tell, the pulpit, contrary to the "tradition of the elders," was placed in the north side, instead of the east, thus, as was generally believed, to indicate the gospel was to advance from the east to the west, because the wise men "who came to see him that was born King of the Jews" came from the east.

While Mr. McRee was the pastor of Steele Creek congregation, the subject of Psalmody was extensively discussed, particularly in relation to the introduction of Watts' Psalms and Hymns. He delivered a course of sermons on the whole subject of Psalmody as a part of Christian worship, the substance of which, says Dr. Foote, "he afterwards condensed into an essay of great clearness and force, and has not been surpassed for strength of argument or clearness of expression." It was no doubt owing in part to the influence of these sermons, that Watts' Psalms and Hymns were first introduced into the worship of Steele Creek church. Mr. McRee was first a member of Orange Presbytery, subsequently, after its second division, he was thrown into Concord. Notwithstanding the distance and difficulties of travel in those days, he punctually attended the meetings of the different church courts, the Presbyteries, and Synods, and he was a member of the General Assembly in 1802. The Synod of North Carolina has met at different times at Steele Creek church, first in 1792, and again in



1794. The Presbytery has very often held its sessions there. During the whole of Mr. McRee's ministry with this congregation, we hear of no dissensions or disturbances, till about the time he was leaving; there were then some annoyances or indignities shown him, but his own negroes were supposed to be the principal agents in producing these. "The Rev. James McRee was of middling stature, handsomely proportioned, agreeable in manners, winning in conversation, neat in his dress, dignified in the pulpit, fluent in his delivery, and diligent in his preparations; he was a popular preacher, and retained his influence long after he had ceased to be active in the vineyard of his Master."

Some of the elders already mentioned served during his time, and some of them long after his pastorate with this church had ceased. Of William Barnett, a ruling elder, we can find no record; but we infer he must have been a young man of influence and decided piety, from the fact that he was elected so early in life to the responsible office of a ruler in the house of God. He died in 1785, aged twenty-seven years, and now sleeps among our dead in Steele Creek graveyard.

James McRee was born in Fredell county, N. C., May 10th, 1752, about one mile from Centre church, on the place since owned by Rufus Reed, Esq.; his parents having emigrated from the country of Down, Ireland, 1730. "They belonged, he said, to the Presbyterian denomination." He further adds that it was the custom of his father and the neighbors to ask the questions of the Shorter Catechism every Sabbath (a pretty fair evidence, we think, of his being a Presbyterian) to each member of the family in rotation; and the young people that could not repeat them were not considered as holding a respectable rank in society.\* From the same source we learn, "In his manuscripts, he tells us that there was a flourishing classical school kept in the bounds of Centre church from an early period; after continuing for twenty years it was broken up by the invasion." It may have been taught part of the time by the Rev.

\* Foote.



Thomas H. McCaule; another part of the time, it was carried on by a Mr. McErwin. It was here he prosecuted his Academic studies. At the age of twenty-one he entered the junior class in Princeton College, New Jersey, in the year 1773, and graduated in 1775. After receiving the degree of A. B., he spent a year as a private tutor in the family of Col. Burwell Bassett, in New Kent county, Virginia. In the winter of 1776 he returned home, and spent that winter and the next (1777) reading Theology under the direction of "his highly esteemed former teacher and friend," the Rev. Joseph Alexander of Bullock's Creek, in South Carolina, and was licensed, as before stated, to preach the gospel by Orange Presbytery, in April, 1778. He continued the pastor of Steele Creek till the year 1797—in all, about twenty years. During this time he not only preached to his own charge, but frequently to the surrounding congregations. "Often," says he, "have I ridden in the morning to Bethel, (S. C.), Providence, Sugar Creek, and Hopewell, and preached and returned home in the evening of the same day.

After resigning his pastoral charge in Steele Creek, he was without charge for a year or more, during which time various vacancies were presented to him for consideration: Pine Street church, Philadelphia; Princeton, New Jersey; Augusta, Georgia; and his native congregation, Centre. After duly weighing each of their claims, he says: "The shortness of life, the uncertainty of all things here, extensive acquaintance, relations, numerous friends, pleasant, healthful country, native soil, all combined and said, stay where you are." He was settled in Centre about thirty miles north from Steele Creek, in 1798, and continued the pastor of that church about thirty years. In 1803 and 1804, he preached in Salisbury, N. C., once a month. There was there, no separate congregation or organised church at that time. At length, on account of the infirmities of age, he gave up his pastoral charge at Centre, removed into the mountains, and resided with his children.

In the year 1839, he said his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, amounted to eighty. Truly, this





was a family of almost patriarchal numbers. He said he "had preached more than a thousand times in Steele Creek church, and at that time, not one was living that used to meet him there as members of his church; that he laid in Steele Creek grave-yard his father and mother, five brothers and two sisters; that he had preached in Centre about two thousand times; and that on leaving his congregations he was unable to preach a farewell on account of his own feelings. "It was his desire to be buried with his loved ones in Steele Creek, but Providence ordered otherwise. He was honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity, from the University of North Carolina, in 1810. We know not that he ever published anything, except the Essay on the subject of Psalmody, to which we have before alluded. He closed his earthly career on the 28th of March, 1840, in the 88th year of his age, and in the 62nd of his ministry. We here append an obituary notice, taken from a newspaper, published soon after his death:

"Died, in Buncombe county, N. C., on the 28th of March, 1840, at the house of his son-in-law, Col. Davidson, the Rev. James McRee, D. D., in his 88th year. His health had been delicate for several years, yet he never seemed to suffer much pain or sickness, and even during his last illness, which lasted but three or four days, he seemed to suffer but little. When asked how he felt, his reply was, "quite well." He was unable to preach much for a number of years before his death. During the last year of his life, he preached one formal sermon; yet he made frequent short addresses to the people among whom he resided. He ever manifested a very lively interest in the cause of religion. It seemed to be the theme of his constant meditation, and almost every-day conversation. He felt, and often expressed a very deep concern, especially for those little churches west of the Blue Ridge. May his prayers for them be answered speedily."

His mantle as a preacher of righteousness fell not upon either of his sons. His bones now quietly rest amid the bowers of the Swannanae, far removed from the scenes of his early toils and ministerial labors.



We have already given the names of those who, we believe, composed the first bench, or classis of ruling elders in Steele Creek church. In the absence of all documentary authority, we have to rely mainly upon tradition for information on this important part of our history. That the persons whose names we have mentioned, were ruling elders, there is not a doubt. But as to the date or chronological order of their election or ordinations, we cannot speak with certainty. We have no idea that all these persons were elected at the same time, but they were contemporaries; by this we mean that the labors, or office term of the first, overlapped that of the second, and thus they were co-workers with each other. Whether the term of office of any of these, dates back to the time of the Rev. Robert Henry, the first pastor, or to the organisation of the church, or was subsequent, or only co-eval with the pastorate of Dr. McRee, we have no means of satisfactorily determining—but in reference to some of them, we feel assured that their term of office ante-dates the time of Dr. McRee. General Robert Irwin, and Zaccheus Wilson while sitting as members of the venerable Mecklenburg Convention, May 19th and 20th, 1775, in which the first Declaration of Independence was drafted and proclaimed to the world, were then elders. But those who may have been most zealous and influential as elders or private members in getting up the church here, may have been of those whose names neither tradition nor history have preserved. Noble deeds are often achieved in humble life, without challenging applause. Hence it may be said of the first elders in Steele Creek church, "Their titles of renown have not been registered in the imperishable records of humanity." It may be possible that some of the names that should be placed at the head of our list, are forgotten by tradition, and may have passed into oblivion. Others, however, as Gen. Robert Irwin, and Zaccheus Wilson, with the other patriots, with whom they took counsel, have erected monuments to their memories, more lasting than brass.

Of Gen. Irwin's public and political history, we have already spoken. We will now speak of him socially, and



as an officer in the church. He was a native of Pennsylvania, but emigrated to this State and settled in this neighborhood in early life. He never enjoyed the advantages of either classical or collegiate education; but possessing an intellect considerably above the generality of men, capable of culture and improvement, by his own exertions he acquired considerable knowledge of matters pertaining to Church and State, in both of which he manifested a deep and lively interest. He was of a social, genial disposition, fond of anecdote, of great conversational powers, and withal, a fluent, popular speaker. Hence the frequency of his being placed in important positions, requiring the exercise of such gifts. In addition to the many other honors and offices conferred on him, he was appointed one of the county magistrates. In virtue of the powers or functions of this office, he was frequently called on to solemnise the rite of matrimony, and it is said of him, he would very often keep the parties on the floor for three quarters of an hour, with his ceremony and a word of exhortation." *O tempora! O mores!*

He was not only noble in the church, serving over 20 years as a ruling elder, but noble in the Senate, where he served twelve years, and noble in the field, in times that tried men's souls, having served with General Thomas Sumpter during the most dark and perilous period of our Revolutionary struggle. He died at his home in Steele Creek, on the 23d of December, 1800, aged 62 years. He is buried in our graveyard. Himself and wife, Mary, lie in the same grave. The same monumental slab covers them both, with this modest and just inscription upon it:

"Great, noble, generous, good, and brave,

Characters he did justly claim:

His deed shall speak beyond the grave,

And those unborn, his praise proclaim."

Of ZACCHEUS WILSON we know but little, beyond the part he acted in the Mecklenburg Convention, and as a member of the General Assembly. He was said to be a man of liberal education, and very popular in the county in which he resided. He afterwards removed to Sumner



county, Tennessee, where he died; his history is lost to us, and his grave unknown among strangers.

ANDREW McNEELY removed from our midst and settled in the bounds of Sugar Creek church, N. C., where he died, and he is buried in their graveyard. Of the other elders we will speak, as we come to the times of their death.

THE ORGANISATION OF TWO SECEDER CHURCHES WITHIN OUR TERRITORIAL LIMITS.—1st. The Associate Reformed; 2nd. The Associate Church. Both now united in *one Associate Reformed Church*.

During the latter part of the pastorate of Dr. McRee at Steele Creek church, and the interregnum that prevailed, to the settlement of his successor, two seceder churches, (of like name but not exactly of the same order) were organised within our bounds. Of these, it may not be improper for us to speak, at least to state the causes which led to their formation. We now diverge somewhat from the direct line of our own history, while we give something of the origin and organisation of our neighbors. Of the formation of churches planted within our bounds, not, however, as having gone out from us, or ever having been one with us; but for many years both occupying the same common ground, claiming the same ancestry, speaking the same vernacular, united in blood and *nearly* in creed, their families interwoven as warp and woof of the same piece, and for a number of years, (owing to the sparseness of the population, and the difficulty of obtaining ministerial supplies) all doubtless worshipped together, not as an organised church under the same vine and fig-tree, or (to use words less scriptural but more literal) under the wide spread branches of some umbrageous oak. How long this state of things may have existed, we have no means of determining; but we hear of no separate services being held, or other arrangements being made till 1793 or 1794. Even then, there were no dissensions, or differences among the people, either as to doctrine or church order; but from a preference for "the good old ways," and the faith of their fathers,





some were disposed to draw off and form themselves into more congenial societies. About this time, however, the Rev. James McRee, D. D., pastor of Steele Creek church, preached a series of sermons on the whole subject of Psalmody, as apart of Christian worship, which he condensed into an essay form, and which was published. This may have had its influence; but did not occasion the separation between Abraham and Lot. The congregations were closely intermingled, and both then retained a partiality for "David's Psalms" in metre. To this day, Steele Creek introduces the public worship every Sabbath by singing one of Rouse's Psalms. Upon this subject they say, "Let there be no strife between me and thee, you go to the right, and I will go to the left." In this matter, they exercised discretion and kindness towards each other, and thus have prevented any discussions or unkind feelings springing up among them—and this mystic link, this preserving cincture thrown around, has ever kept the two congregations on friendly and neighborly terms with each other. As early as 1775, there were a few families of the Burgher and anti-Burghers, (as called in their native land; but by the nomenclature of this country we prefer to designate them, the Erskine and Mason parties), settled on the waters of Steele Creek, North Carolina. They were Scotch-Irish immigrants, mostly from the county Antrim, Ireland, and who still cherished much of the feelings that brought their exiled forefathers to this country. Here it may not be out of place to state that the Secession Church withdrew from the Established Church in 1733 or 1734. They differed chiefly in matters of Church government. At first, the Secession (or withdrawing) party, consisted of only four members, viz.: Ebenezer Erskine, Wm. Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher; but their numbers were soon duplicated. In 1747—some fourteen years after their organisation as a body—they unfortunately had a split or division among themselves on what was called the Burgess oath, which involved the right of citizens of every burgh or township to vote in the elections of their pastor. This could only be done under certain restrictions or quali-



fications—they must be heritors of landed property. Here the two Erskines, (Ebenezer and Ralph), and James Fisher were on the Burgher side, and in favor of the oath; while Monerieff, Mair, Gib, and others, formed the anti-Burghers, who objected to the lawfulness of taking the oath. In this controversy was fully verified the words of Solomon: "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle." The feelings which there existed between the parties, had not passed out of the memories of their descendants after they came to this country, although the laws of the land here imposed no such restrictions, nor did the Church require such an oath. It was thought best that each family should dwell apart in their own house. Hence they endeavored to obtain supplies of their own, from whatever quarter they could, or wherever they were to be had. Most of their supplies were from the Presbytery of Pennsylvania—some few direct from Ireland. Some of their earliest preachers were William Martin, (Covenanter,) Bryce Miller, John Renwick, Thomas Clark, M. D., and John Boyce.

In 1772 or 1773, the Rev. William Blackstocks arrived from Ireland, and was ordained by the Associate Reformed Presbytery of the Carolinas. and in 1794, he organised a church, some eight miles south of Steele Creek, called LOWER STEELE CREEK, but now more generally known as *Blackstocks*, in honor of its founder. The following persons were elected and ordained elders, viz.: James Grier, James Harris, James Knox, William Ferguson, and Alexander Scott. This congregation then united with the churches of Ebenezer and Neely's Creek, York Dist., South Carolina, in a call for the pastoral labors of Mr. Blackstock which he accepted, and was soon after installed their pastor. This relation he retained quietly for a few years, when an unfortunate division took place from an apparently very trivial cause. It had long been the practice in the church, (a habit brought over from the old country,) to have a fast day precede the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the Monday immediately following observed as a thanks-



giving. Those who had imbibed the views and liberal sentiments of Dr. John Mason on these subjects, were for setting aside these "standing rules," and having the whole church unitedly keep a fast whenever the providence of God should indicate the necessity. To the Burghers—those made of "sterner stuff"—this was too great an innovation, or departure from the "good old ways." The laws of the Medes and Persians alter not. Mr. Blackstock was more Catholic in his feelings than some of his brethren who regarded Dr. Mason too much of a latitudinarian—those whose "neck was an iron sinew and their brow brass"—and they could not abide these innovations. Hence rose a dispute, out of which resulted the withdrawal of several families and two of the ruling elders. These disaffected parties were, by the advice and counsel of the Rev. William Dixon, organised into the society of *Little Steele Creek* in 1799 or 1800, this not more than one mile south of Steele Creek church. James Grier, Wm. Ferguson, (who had been elders in the *Lower Church*,) and Thomas Moore, were elected the first elders in this church. This church, with the ministers who supplied it, (viz: Mr. Dixon and occasionally the Rev. Peter McMillan—more commonly called McMullen), placed themselves in connection with the Associate Synod of North America. Their society was small at first, but after being severed in twain, becoming bicepital, how appropriately might their pastors have said, "the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids."

Tradition hands down the story of Mr. Blackstock, whose very appearance might have suggested to a stranger the etymon of his name, (for he was very dark-skinned,) and who uttered his native dialect *ore rotundo*, that on a certain occasion after this division had taken place, while preaching to his little charge from the text, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," after being warmed up by his subject, and perhaps somewhat agitated by the presence of one of the elders who had withdrawn from him and been instrumental in effecting the division, after pronouncing the words "ye are a little flock" with peculiar emphasis, at the same time point-



ing his brawny dexter at him, said, "and we may thank you for it, Jimmy Grier."

Messrs. Dixon and McMillan were the first Associate ministers who came to this part of the country. They came from the North, and only preached as occasional supplies. It was not long before Mr. McMillan was charged with being guilty of an evil habit, not uncommon in those days, of making too free use of the intoxicating cup. His frequent indulgence not only destroyed his standing and usefulness as a minister, but made him a proper subject for church discipline. But there was no church court in all this region before which to bring him to trial. One had to be formed for the occasion. The Rev. John Anderson and Rev. William Wilson were sent out from a Presbytery in Pennsylvania, to form here a court in connection with Mr. Dixon, to try Peter McMillan. The result of their investigations was the conviction of Mr. McMillan of the charges and his suspension from the office and functions of the ministry. Their sentence was neither respected nor kept in good faith by him. He continued to trouble the church. The year following, (1801,) the Rev. Ebenezer Henderson was again sent out as a delegate from the North to aid Mr. Dixon in trying to settle these difficulties; but he accomplished very little more than those who had preceded him. His mission was short, but his stay, together with his intercourse and labors among the people, so gained on their affections and confidence, that they determined to give him a call to become their pastor, which they did; the call was made out, but never presented, as in the mysterious providence of God, he died at Stanton, Va., on his return home.

A little before this time, the Rev. Alexander Moore, a Seceder minister, came from Ireland and settled in this neighborhood; not, however, as the pastor or stated supply of Little Steele Creek, nor does it appear he had taken charge of any church in this country. He came to this county in 1797, and settled on a place now owned by James Coffee, near a creek which took its name from him, Moore's Creek. The same year, after his settlement here, he





sickened and died, April 19th, 1797, aged 44 years, and his bones rest among our dead in Steele Creek graveyard. He was nineteen years in the ministry, eighteen of which he spent at Glaske, in the county Down, Ireland, the other was spent in coming to this country, and in finding a home for his family.

In the year 1801, the Rev. Mr. Crie supplied the Steele Creek congregation for six months. After him, the Rev. Mr. White and others ministered to them at different times, and afterwards Messrs. Mushat and Heron, till the church made out their call for the Rev. JAMES PRINGLE, who accepted the same, and was ordained and installed pastor of the united churches of Steele Creek, Gilead and Bethany, in April, 1814. He was the first pastor of this church. His connection with this people, though pleasant and useful, was short, lasting only about four years. In 1818 he died at the house of Col. Thomas J. Grier, with whom he made his home. He never married. He was born and reared in Ireland, came to this country when young, and settled first in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and thence removed to Steele Creek, North Carolina. He was considered a fine scholar and a popular preacher, liberal in his views and feelings towards other denominations of Christians—quite too much so for the charity of some of his confriars, who were disposed to look on all others with jaundiced eyes, except those who bore their own name. So much were the feelings of some of his brethren exasperated against him because of his liberality, that they threatened “to take him up about it.” This intelligence came to his ears, and he determined to meet it in the spirit which he thought to be the best and wisest. He accordingly carefully prepared a sermon, in accordance with his feelings, from the text, Jer. vii. 4: “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these,” and waited his own opportunity to preach it before his less tolerant and offended brethren. Such was its spirit, and such the force of truth unfolded in this discourse, that nothing more was ever heard of charges to be preferred against him.

His brother, Francis Pringle, was also a Seceder minister.



and pastor of a church in Ohio. Being in feeble health, he came South, on a visit to his brother James, in the spring previous to his death, and died a few months before him. James died the autumn following. Thus the two brothers, with little more than a year's difference in the time of their births, and though their fields of labor were far apart, strange to relate, died under the same roof, in less than a year of each other. Tenderly attached in life, they were not long separated in death. They now lie side by side in the graveyard of Steele Creek, the common burying ground of both the churches. Whatever difference may exist in life, they are all buried here. Francis died on the 15th of March, 1818, in the fourth year of his ministry, and the 29th year of his age; James died on the 28th of the succeeding October, in the fifth year of his ministry, and the thirtieth year of his age. The bereaved congregations (though locally far apart) united and erected one broad, white marble slab to cover the graves of the two pastors, united in their infancy and youth, united in their religion, undivided in death, and in the hope of a glorious resurrection. "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

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From this time, the church remained vacant a few years, with only such supplies as they could obtain. In the year 1821 they made out a call for the Rev. Abraham Anderson, which he accepted, and was ordained and installed their pastor, October, 1821. He was a strong anti slavery man, and during his stay he must have thought, "the day is terrible, who can abide it?" He would tarry no longer, "neither stay in all the plain." These feelings with his unpopular method of introducing and discussing this vexed question, rendered it prudent and expedient for him to resign his charge, which he did in the year 1833, and returned to his more congenial home in the State of Pennsylvania. He was elected Professor in the Seminary at Canonsburg where he died.

He was succeeded, in Steele Creek, by the Rev. Arch



bald Whyte, who remained till the spring of 1840. During his pastoral services here, occurred the separation of the Associate Presbytery of the Carolinas, from the Associate Synod, on the subject of slavery." After the year 1840, the church remained vacant with occasional supplies, till they called the Rev. James B. Watt, who was ordained and installed pastor of the united churches of Steele Creek and Sardis, in November, 1844. During this year, the union was effected between the Associate Presbytery, and the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, and the two congregations of Steele Creek, (known as the "Lower," and, "Little Steele Creek,") which had been separated for forty-five years, again coalesced, and as one, united with Sardis in a call for the pastoral labors of Mr. Watt. He accepted, and remained with them till he withdrew from the Seceder body, and returned to the Presbyterian church, within whose pale he had been reared. More will be said of Mr. Watt in the proper place in this history. He was succeeded by the Rev James C. Chalmers, the present incumbent, who was called September, 1858, and having signified his acceptance, was installed on 29th October, of the same year, and still continues (1872) their acceptable and worthy pastor. Not intending to write the history of our neighbors' church, but merely to state the causes which led to its organisation in our midst, we find that we have suffered ourselves to indulge in a long digression--to expand into a general historic sketch.

After wandering in *terra incognita*, we again take up the dropped stitch in the thread of our own history.

#### THE THIRD PASTOR--THE REV. HUMPHREY HUNTER

Began his labors at Steele Creek church, June, 1804. From the time Dr. McRee resigned his connection with this church in 1797, till they invited the Rev. Humphrey Hunter in 1804, to become their pastor, during this long period of six or seven years, we find Steele Creek put down among the vacant churches in the Minutes of the General Assembly. It is hardly credible, or to be presumed that a church which was yearly reported, "able to



support a minister," and had so long enjoyed the services of a pastor, could, or would feel satisfied to remain destitute of the stated means of grace. While it is true that we find no account of where they endeavored to obtain a supply for any one, or even a portion of any one of these years—while we are unable to bridge over such a hiatus, still it is too long to admit of a reasonable allowance. Yet there may have been a necessity for it, not apparent to us. They may have been unfortunate in their selections for supplies, or unsuccessful in their invitations, and could not obtain the aid they sought. There are circumstances connected with the state of the church at that time, which seem to justify us in such a supposition. It was about the time that Dr. McRee left, or soon after, that the congregation undertook to put up a new and more costly church. It was to be a frame building, sixty-five feet long by forty wide, hip roofed, weatherboarded and ceiled, with a gallery across one end for the accommodation of the blacks, which was put in many years afterwards. The style and expense of this building, connected with the energy with which the work was carried on and completed, would go to show that the church was not in a cold or lukewarm state. To erect such a building was no ordinary work in those days. There were few saw-mills in the country, and most of the timbers would have to be gotten out by the whip-saw. The contract was given out to different parties. Richard (or, as he was more commonly called, Derrick) Orton, a Dutchman, undertook to get out the frame; and Hugh Stinson, from Hopewell congregation, was to do the other carpenter work. The whole was completed betwixt 1800 and 1802, and no doubt was regarded a complete job when finished. As it still stands, we need be at no loss to conceive or describe its appearance. It was built a few paces south of where the old church stood, and has quite an airy appearance, without any high pretensions, having four doors, two in the south side and one in each end, and originally four windows in each side and two in the ends; the pulpit standing about mid way on the north side. But the most remarkable part about the whole building, is the gallery.





The ceiling of the house is not more than fourteen feet from the floor, and of course could not be extended in a horizontal line over the gallery, but abruptly terminates in front of it, leaving but a narrow space for the downward look, and affording a *sharp* point of observation to those below, who may wish to take a peep at the occupants above. It reminds us of what has been said of the Ladies' gallery in the British House of Commons. At the end of the hall, and opposite the gentlemen's gallery, there is a small room, separated by a wooden grating, behind which, scarcely visible, a party of ladies sometimes assemble for the purpose of hearing the speeches, and in reference to which, some lord on a certain occasion, at a dinner party, gave as a toast, "To the hens in the coop." But why should we seem to speak facetiously of a dedicated building, which has served for more than a generation, where the tribes have gone up and found a safe resting place from the summer's sun and the snows of winter? It has been as we hope, the birth-place of many souls, the centre of many hopes, and from whose altar many joys and prayers have made glad the hearts of God's people. And now, in its decay, and green old age, partly clad in ruin's pall, we hope its final demolition amid the graves of our dead, will be no cause of sorrow or hard feelings among the living.

WALTER DAVIS, a ruling elder in Steele Creek church, died December 18th, 1800, aged 65 years, and is buried in our graveyard. Beyond this, we have not been able to collect anything more of his history.

After remaining so many years without a settled pastor, the congregation at length united in making a call to the Rev. H. Hunter, for a part of his time. He was then laboring in the united charges of Goshen and Unity churches in what was then Lincoln, but now Gaston county, N. C. Mr. Hunter having signified his willingness to accept their invitation, resigned his connection with Unity in the year 1804, and then became the pastor of Goshen and Steele Creek churches. At first, dividing his time equally betwixt them; subsequently he gave three-fourths of his time to Steele Creek, and the remaining fourth to Goshen.



reserving, however, the fifth Sabbath, when it occurred, for New Hope church, lying a few miles below Goshen, on the the west side of the Catawba River. This arrangement existed for the years 1812 and 1813 at least, and may have lasted for a longer time. His home was in Lincoln county, some eight miles west from Steele Creek, with the river between. In this wide and important field he continued to labor for twenty-three years, till the time of his death. During this service, Mr. Hunter at times had his heart gladdened by seeing encouraging accessions of new members to the church. At other times things occurred calculated to discourage, and no doubt operated against the success of his labors in this church. He lived at a distance, entirely without the bounds of Steele Creek, and the river in the way; a good deal of his time was occupied as a practising physician, (in this, however, his labors were rather acts of benevolence, than of pecuniary gain to himself,) and for many of the latter years of his life he was very deaf. One, not a contemporary of his, but well acquainted with his method of conducting things, furnishes us with this information, as to the condition of things at Steele Creek soon after his death. "He had a method of preaching *sui generis*, as to subjects and manner. The congregation paid him very little. Prayer-meetings were among the *novelties*, and did not then exist. Nothing had ever been done for the Bible cause, missions, or Sabbath-schools." The two latter were objects which in those days were not much agitated or patronised by the church anywhere. In addition to these, there were two prevalent habits in the community, which were the occasion of great injury to the cause of religion, not only within the bounds of this congregation, but in other places adjacent (and it is to be feared their influence has not yet entirely passed away), viz.: dancing parties, and the habitual use of intoxicating liquors. The former was very frequently indulged in by those in and out of the church, especially the the young, at weddings and other neighborhood gatherings. This habit may not then have been regarded an offence



deserving the exercise of church discipline. Too many were prepared to adopt the sentiment of Cowper.

“Strike up the fiddles, let us be gay,  
Laymen have leave to dance, if parsons play.”

Drinking was common on all occasions, and was deemed a mark of refinement and social hospitality. “Bottles could be seen and were handed out, in almost every family, and sometimes made their appearance even at the church, where men used a little, not only for the stomach’s sake and their often infirmities, but to intoxication and disorder.” These things we might pass over *sub silentio* did they not make a part of our history.

Dr. Hunter, (as he was commonly called, and why, we will hereafter explain), was above the ordinary stature, of a robust frame, and of a dark complexion. He was a close observer of men and things, a close reasoner, classic in his style, and systematic in his preaching. His congregations were well instructed in divine truth according to the orthodoxy of the Confession of Faith. He was a man of great intrepidity of character, and possessed a talent for refined sarcasm, which, when occasion called for it, he could use with great power. As a minister he was always distinguished by his evangelical sentiments and orthodoxy according to the standards of the Presbyterian Church. His preaching was earnest, unassuming, and at times eloquent. His habits of preparing for the pulpit, like nearly all the laborious men of his generation, were reading, meditation, and writing short notes. As he wrote no sermons in full, of course he never read his sermons from the pulpit. We do not find that he ever published any of his writings. The last sermon he preached at Steele Creek church was from the text, 2 Cor. v. 20: “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” How few of the large assembly, who were his hearers at Steele Creek on that day, now forty-five years gone, are alive to testify to the persuasive appeals of that sermon, and of the pious zeal and earnestness with which the aged ambassa-



dor for Christ enforced his last message, or to testify how faithfully he proclaimed to them for more than a score of years the unsearchable riches of Christ! His great simplicity of manners, and freedom from affectation readily gained the confidence and friendship of all who knew him. In his advanced years, the infirmities of age greatly contracted his useful labors without impairing the vigor of his mental powers, or fervency and faithfulness of his preaching. But a sudden illness on a Sabbath evening, after preaching one of his most animated, forcible, and interesting sermons, (from the text above referred to) to the people of Steele Creek, rapidly prostrated his already enfeebled constitution, and admonished him that his earthly pilgrimage was soon to terminate. He met his approaching end with unshaken firmness and Christian resignation, and peacefully breathed his last, August 21st, 1872, in the 73d year of his age.

To us, one of his successors, it is no less a grateful task than Christian duty, to try to preserve and perpetuate the history of such a true patriot and faithful soldier of the cross. We shall therefore glean our information from those, who before us, have gathered what dropped from his own hand, together with what may be found on file in the Governor's office, at Raleigh, N. C.

The Rev. Humphrey Hunter was born on the 14th of May, 1755, in the vicinity of Londonderry, Ireland. His father was well known in his day as a respectable drapery merchant on the "Bleach-green Farm." His paternal grandfather was from Glasgow, Scotland. His maternal grandfather was from Brest, in France. His descent is thus traced to the Scotch-Irish and French Huguenots. The blood of the Scotch and the Huguenot was blended in Ireland. At the age of four years, he was deprived by death of his father. His widowed mother resided on the same farm several years after this bereavement. At length, influenced somewhat by worldly considerations, hoping the more easily to provide for her young and rising family, she determined to fall in with the tide of emigration, then setting in for the New World. Accordingly, on the 3d of





May, 1759, with her little family, she sailed in the ship *Helena*, bound for Charleston, S. C., and on the 27th of August she safely reached her destined port. She obtained a conveyance and proceeded to the eastern part of Mecklenburg county, (now Cabarras,) where she purchased a small tract of land, not far from Poplar Tent church, and remained there during her life. It was in this neighborhood that Humphrey grew up. From the time of his reaching Mecklenburg county, till his twentieth year, little is known of him. When in his twenty-first year, he states, he attended the convention in Charlotte, on May 20th, 1775, as one of the numerous spectators assembled on that exciting occasion. As he said, he then "enjoyed the privilege of listening to the reading of the *first public Declaration of Independence* in the United States, and joined in the shout of approval which burst forth from a large and deeply interested audience. In these exciting times, "when every man was a soldier," he was soon found enlisted for the defence of his country. Here, did it properly belong to our history, we could record many noble deeds of daring adventure and faithful service he performed as a soldier in defence of his country; but these are incidents which more properly belong to the pages of other historians. It may not, however, be altogether amiss in us to say, in the unfortunate battle at Camden, S. C., where our men were surrounded by overwhelming forces, and many of our soldiers were taken prisoners, that Hunter was taken among them. He and others were soon stripped of most of their clothing, hat and coat, and while standing by in this condition under guard, he witnessed the death of Baron De Kalb. After being confined seven days in a prison yard in Camden, he was taken, with many other prisoners, including about fifty officers, to Orangeburg, S. C., there to remain until exchanged—and there he was kept, without hat or coat, till the thirteenth of November following, when, by a daring act, he and several others made their escape on a Sabbath night, previous to the day on which they were to be tried for violating the rules of prison life. They mutinied according to a preconcerted plan, seized and dis-



armed the guard, and made their escape. To avoid detection and arrest, which would have imperilled their lives, they were compelled to travel at night, and conceal themselves by day. During the whole time of their flight, their only means of subsistence, was upon the greenest of the ears of corn they could find in the unharvested fields. On the ninth night after escaping from Orangeburg, they crossed the Catawba River and arrived safely in Mecklenburg. After this, for some years, he appeared alternately to lay aside his books and take up arms in defence of his home and country. Soon after his first campaign of service under Capt. Charles Polk was ended, he commenced his classical education at "Clio's Nursery," in the western part of Rowan county, (now Iredell) under the instruction of the Rev. James Hall. Here he remained for some time; but another emergency arose, requiring his services. It was at this time that the Cherokee Indians began hostilities, and committed numerous murders and depredations on the inhabitants near the sources of the Catawba. In this campaign Hunter acted as Lieutenant under Col. Mebane; but after a few skirmishes, in which several Indians were killed, and many more taken prisoners, the war ended. After his return from the Cherokee Nation, he resumed the prosecution of his studies at "Queen's Museum" in Charlotte, under the direction of Dr. McWhorter from New Jersey. During the summer of 1780, this institution having in the meantime assumed the more patriotic name of "Liberty Hall Academy," it was broken up by the approach of the British army under Cornwallis. Dr. McWhorter sent home the youth to their parents, and the young men he urged to take up arms in defence of their country. Hunter's studies were never again resumed at this place. Dr. McWhorter returned to his native home in New Jersey. Notwithstanding the interruptions and hindrances that were constantly being thrown in his way, at every lull or apparent cessation of troubles, he renewed his studies with increased zeal and determination to obtain an education. From certificates, we find that he pursued his classical studies for some years at a school taught by Rev.



Robert Archibald, near Poplar Tent. During the summer of 1785, he entered the Junior Class at Mount Zion College, Wimsboro, S. C., (which after the war, for a time supplied the place of "Liberty Hall" or "Queen's Museum" at Charlotte,) and graduated in July 1787. In a short time after this, he commenced the study of Theology under the care of the Presbytery of South Carolina, most probably under the direction of the Rev. Joseph Alexander of Bullock's Creek, S. C., for he was licensed to preach at Bullock's Creek on the 15th of October, 1789. The first four or five years of his ministerial labors were spent in South Carolina.

On the first day of October, 1791, a call was regularly made out and signed by the greater portion of the male members, for his labors in the churches of Hopewell and Aimwell on the Pee Dee in South Carolina. This call he accepted, and was ordained some time the next year, as his name first appears upon the records of the Synod as a member in 1793. On the 31st of December, 1789, he was united in marriage with Jane, daughter of Dr. George Ross, of Laurens district. Being thus connected with a distinguished physician, he availed himself of the favorable opportunity of acquiring a practical knowledge of medicine, sufficiently extensive for family purposes. After his removal to Lincoln county, N. C., owing to the scarcity of good physicians at that period, he was often called upon by his neighbors to administer to their wants. His good judgment, and remarkable success in treating diseases, soon opened up for him an extensive practice; so much so, that for a time it threatened to interfere with his ministerial duties. His fees for such labors were usually very moderate, and this, no doubt, with other things, had its influence in widening the circle of his practice. It was in this way he attained the title of *Doctor*. He was not *Divinitatis Doctor*, nor *Verbi Dei Magistri*, but *Medicine Doctor*. For reasons unknown to us, in the year 1795, Mr. Hunter resigned his charges in South Carolina, and removed to Lincoln county, N. C., and became a member of Orange Presbytery on the first day of its meeting at Bethpage church,



December 24th. The same year (1795), by an act of Synod, the Presbytery of Concord was set off, consisting of twelve members, of which he was one. On March the 30th, 1796, a call was presented to him from the united churches of Goshen and Unity. He accepted it and settled in the bounds of Goshen congregation. He continued to minister to these churches regularly till the year 1804, when for some reason not known to us, he had his connection with Unity church dissolved—and the same year received and accepted a call for one-half of his time from Steele Creek church. With these churches (occasionally supplying New Hope church) he remained for a period of twenty-three years, till his death, which occurred in the seventy-third year of his age. He was blessed with Asher's blessing—"many children." His wife was a fruitful vine, and his children were as olive plants around his table. They had ten children in all—four sons and six daughters—a pair of twins were still-born. Henry died when twelve years old. Two of his sons studied medicine, and George R. studied law. Elijah's mantle did not fall on either of these Elishas, yet it may be said of the only two of his sons who attained fully to the years of maturity, that they were elected and served as ruling elders—George, in Horeb church, Fairfield district, S. C., and Dr. Cyrus L. Hunter, in Castania Grove church, Lincoln county—and now the only surviving member of the family. All the rest, with their father, have been numbered among the dead!

During Dr. Hunter's pastorate at Steele Creek, the following elders were removed by death, viz., David Freeman, the head of a numerous household, who died April 27th, 1808, aged sixty-six years; James Hart, who died August 10th, 1852, aged sixty-one years; and Joseph Swann, who died in 1827, aged eighty-three years. At the time of his death, the following persons composed the bench of ruling elders in Steele Creek, viz.: Reuben Freeman, (the son of David, deceased,) David McDonald, James Brown, John McDowell, John Hart, James Neely, and Francis Mitchell Beaty. Hugh Parks, who had been a ruling elder in this church for several years, was permitted some time previous





to this, to demit his office in consequence of some offence he took at Dr. Hunter, in not extending as he thought, the ordinary civilities to his son, (who was a minister), while on a visit to this community. Mr. Parks was considered a good man and a kind neighbor, but impulsive. He died January 12, 1830, aged seventy-six years. He, with the above named deceased elders, are all buried in Steele Creek graveyard.

At Dr. Hunter's death, the people of Steele Creek had the sad privilege of giving him a place of sepulture among their dead, and of erecting a marble headstone to his grave, which will be found near the Session house in the southwest corner of the old graveyard, with the following appropriate inscription recorded :

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF THE

REV. HUMPHREY HUNTER,

who departed this life August 21st, 1827, in the 73rd year of his age. He was a native of Ireland, and emigrated to America at an early period of his life. He was one of those who early promoted the cause of freedom in Mecklenburg county, May 20th, 1775, and subsequently bore an active part in securing the independence of his country.

For nearly thirty-eight years he labored as a faithful and assiduous ambassador of Christ, strenuously enforcing the necessity of repentance, and pointing out the terms of salvation. As a parent he was kind and affectionate; as a friend warm and sincere, and as a minister, persuasive and convincing.

“Reared by the People of Steele Creek church.”

FOURTH PASTOR—THE REV. SAMUEL LYTLE WATSON.

After the death of Dr. Hunter, this church was vacant but a short time—only a few months. The same fall they



were providentially visited by the Rev. S. L. Watson, then a licentiate under the care of South Carolina Presbytery, by which he had been licensed the year previous. He was present at the fall sacramental meeting, conducted by the Rev. R. H. Morrison, (now D. D.,) and rendered some assistance in the exercises of the meeting. With this short acquaintance before he left, the congregation made arrangements to procure him as their supply for one half of his time for the remaining months of that year, viz., November and December. At the beginning of the next year, (1828,) they applied to him to supply them that year; but now they required two-thirds of his time. To this he agreed, the other third was to be given to Ebenezer church, York district, S. C., with the view of trying to keep them together, as they had been greatly disturbed by the improper conduct of one (Rev. Josiah Harris) who had been compelled to leave them a short time before. According to arrangements previously entered into by his Presbytery, (South Carolina,) he was ordained as an evangelist, in 1828, in order that he might be able the more efficiently and fully to discharge the duties of his western missionary field in which he had labored in 1827, and to which he confidently hoped again to return. But upon his acceding to this new arrangement, he now, as a matter of convenience, applied to be dismissed from South Carolina to join Bethel Presbytery. This first step soon led to another more lasting and binding. That fall they made out a call for him, which was duly presented at the next spring Presbytery, (1829). In the meantime, he had transferred his connection to Concord Presbytery. This call was for three-fourths of his time, the balance he was to give to New Hope church, some ten miles distant beyond the river, in what was then Lincoln but now Gaston county. Mr. Watson having signified his acceptance of this call, was accordingly installed pastor of Steele Creek church, in May, 1829. The Rev. R. H. Morrison preached the sermon. From this date his pastoral labors formally began with this church. At the outset, he felt himself not a little embarrassed by the prevalence of the pernicious habits previously referred



to. The church was considered large and important, though it only, at that time, numbered one hundred and thirty-five white and about twenty black members. Mr. Watson was not a man "with words of learned length and thundering sound," nor was he one who just "hints a fault, and hesitates a dislike;" but he possessed a good share of what John Locke calls "sound round-about sense." By exercising prudence and discretion, together with the counsels of a judicious session, he was enabled greatly to reform the habits of the congregation, and at the same time avoid all dissensions and divisions. During the stay of Mr. Watson, (eleven years,) while there was nothing like what might be called a revival of religion, the church was considerably built up and strengthened. The largest accessions that were made to it during any year of his ministry among them, was in 1832. For years prior to this, during a portion of Dr. Hunter's time, and up to this date, as we have been credibly informed, a portion of the congregation was so infected with intemperance, infidelity, Universalism, and Unitarianism, as almost to cease to attend church; but from a variety of influences brought to bear on them in that year, a good and great work was accomplished. One circumstance worthy of note--there was not only an unusual amount of sickness, but an *alarming* number of deaths. Sometimes as many as three or four funerals in a day--this caused men to stand still and consider. For a time, it appeared as if the house of God was almost deserted, very few being able to go. "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform," and oft "behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face." He overruled this evil for good, made the wrath of man to praise him. He dug about, and caused many a barren tree to bring forth good fruit. Many persons had suffered so much from sickness, that they resolved to move off and try some other portion of the world. This tide of emigration was a heavy drain upon the church. The sickness was not confined to that year; for years afterwards the community suffered severely, nor did Mr. Watson escape; he fared as his congregation did. In a few years he found that frequent attacks of sickness



began to tell upon his constitution, in general prostration and debility. Added to this, was the fact that there was too great a remissness on the part of the congregation, in coming up to the terms of their call—they seemed to forget that “the laborer is worthy of his hire,” that “the Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” With these influences bearing upon him he began seriously to consider what was his duty, whether to remain and suffer or resign his charge. He concluded upon the latter, and he did resign in the month of April, 1810, soon after which he received and accepted a call from Bethel church, York district, S. C., (the congregation in which he was reared,) where he continues the faithful and much esteemed pastor.

In the year 1830, James Brown, an elder at Steele Creek, died October 5th, aged sixty-six years, and is buried in our graveyard.

In the year 1833, Jonathan Reid, William Clark, James M. Sloan, and John Hamilton McDowell were elected elders, and after signifying their acceptance of the office, were ordained by Mr. Watson. Mr. Clark is the only one now of the four that survives. The rest have ceased from their labors and entered upon their rest. The times of their deaths will be stated in the proper order. James Neely, an elder, died June 19th, 1834, aged forty-four years. David McDonald, an elder, died May 14th, 1838, aged 72 years. Both are buried in Steele Creek graveyard.

The whole term of Mr. Watson's labors at Steele Creek, as supply and pastor, was about eleven years. At the time of his resignation, (1810), the following were the elders of the church, viz.: Reuben Freeman, John McDowell, John Hart, F. Mitchel Beaty, William Clark, Jonathan Reid, James M. Sloan, and John Hamilton McDowell.

#### THE REV. SAMUEL L. WATSON,

was the eldest son (and child) of David Watson, of York district, S. C., born February 5th, 1798. His father was for many years an elder in Bethel church. He could truly have said, “God hath endowed me with a good dowry, six





sons," or been called GAD, for "a troop cometh." Samuel stood at the head, and there were ten others. He was baptized at Bethel, by the Rev. Mr. McWhorter. When quite young, he began the study of the languages under the Rev. Robert B. Walker, in Bethesda congregation, where he spent only one year. A few years later, he spent some months at the school of Mr. Lorance at Centre, North Carolina. April, 1816, he entered the Academy of the Rev. J. McWilson, in Rocky River congregation. Here he completed his preparation for college. While at this school he made a profession of religion, and united with the church. He entered the South Carolina College in October of 1818, and graduated in December, 1820. During the years 1821 and 1822, he taught school in the vicinity of Union Court House, S. C. In April, 1822, he was taken under the care of the South Carolina Presbytery, at a church near old Pendleton C. H., and in October, 1823, against the advice of the fathers of the Presbytery, he entered the Seminary at Princeton, N. J. After completing the full course of three years study there, he left in September, 1826, and was licensed (as before stated), at Long Cane church, Abbeville district, S. C., November 17th, 1826. This was at an adjourned meeting, while the members of Presbytery were on their way to Synod, which was to meet that year at Washington, Ga. Immediately after this, he applied for permission to go out as a missionary and labor one year in Alabama, then a new and sparsely settled State. One of the chief points of his missionary operations, was to be in what is now the city of Montgomery. The Presbytery were not cordial in granting his request, as he only gained it by the casting vote of the Moderator, who was a special friend. While at Synod, he obtained a commission from a Missionary Association, composed of members of Synod, to enter upon this work—but with the explicit understanding that he should go on his own expenses—and this was to answer as his letter of introduction. After spending nearly a year there, he returned in the fall, hoping to be ordained and then soon to return again. Fearing his Presbytery might not ordain him as an evangelist, he did not apply



for it. But they did do it, and he was ordained at Good Hope church, March 15th, 1828. Soon after this, all his cherished plans were providentially set aside; instead of going to the west, his steps were turned eastward, and before the year was ended, he was engaged as supply at Steele Creek. He received a call and was installed at the time before mentioned. Not long after his settlement in the congregation, he was united in marriage by the Rev. James S. Adams, to Nancy Hannah Neal, a member of his own flock, and settled about one mile south of the church. Mr. Watson, in person, is tall and slender, (over six feet), dignified in appearance; gentle in his address, uniform in his style of preaching, free from everything like violence, either in declamation or action, and his pulpit exercises are characterised more by the soundness of his theology than pathos of manner. By their marriage they shared in Asher's blessing—many children. They had in all eight—a pair of twins died soon after being born; another died while a child. Five grew up to maturity—three sons and two daughters. His second son, John Franklin, who was not two years of age at the time of his removal from Steele Creek, became a minister of the gospel, was licensed and ordained as an evangelist by Bethel Presbytery, South Carolina. He soon after removed to Arkansas, joined Ouachita Presbytery, and was the stated supply to Princeton and Tulip churches. His labors there were short—he died in June, 1869, leaving a young widow and one child to mourn his loss.

Before we close our account of the labors of Mr. Watson with this people, it is proper we should give some information as to the organisation of another church which he was instrumental in planting, within what was then properly considered the territorial limits of Steele Creek congregation. This step, however, was not taken on account of any dissension or dissatisfaction with the parent church, but merely on account of the distance, and almost impassable state of the roads in winter, which many of them had to travel. The feeling had ripened among them that another church was necessary, as it was almost impossible for them



to give regular attendance upon the services at Steele Creek. For the accommodation of certain parties who could not attend church there, Mr. Watson had been in the habit for some time previous, of preaching in that neighborhood at school-houses or in private families. In the year 1836, this colony which was settled down among the Catawba hills, and lying along the river at a distance of from five to twelve miles from the church, applied to Concord Presbytery to be set off as a separate organisation to be known as

PLEASANT HILL CHURCH.

Their petition was granted, and on Nov. 15th, 1836. Mr. Watson organised the church, consisting of forty-two members, mainly, if not entirely from Steele Creek. The following persons were on the same day elected ruling elders in the church, viz., Robert Knox, David Carothers, Robert C. Neely, and Samuel Knox.

The church was dedicated June 4th, 1837, by Mr. Watson. The elders above named were also ordained by him July 2nd, 1837.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered at Pleasant Hill church, for the first time, August 13th, 1837.

As this swarm went out from Steele Creek and is now a separate church, but have always been united in the same pastoral charge, it will not be improper for us to give a list of their pastors, and the time they served; and also of the elders and deacons, and the times of their election. The Rev. S. L. Watson was their pastor from the time of their organisation in 1836, to 1840.

Rev. Albertus L. Watts, from 1841 to 1853.

Rev. Andrew M. Watson supplied them for the year 1854.

Rev. Samuel Williamson, D. D., was stated supply for the year 1855.

The Rev. G. D. Parks. pastor from January 1st, 1856, to June, 1858.

The Rev. James B. Watt, pastor from October 8th, 1858, to September 16th, 1860.

Rev. S. C. Alexander, pastor from June 16th, 1861, to January, 1866.



Rev. John Douglas, pastor from January, 1866, to date, 1872.

#### RULING ELDERS.

In addition to those above named, at a second election for elders, Thomas B. Price and James B. Knox, were elected November, 1843. Again, January, 1847, Alpheus S. King and Samuel D. Carothers were elected elders.

In 1854, Arthur Randolph Erwin, Dr. G. W. Campbell, and Josina M. Cheat were elected elders.

June, 1853, John Hart, son of James Hart an elder of Steele Creek, and who himself had been an elder there, and Samuel Knox, who had been for a time suspended from his office, were elected elders.

April, 1860, Alexander H. Query, was elected elder and ordained by Rev. James B. Watt, but afterwards, from some difficulty with the Rev. S. C. Alexander then pastor, withdrew from the Presbyterian and joined the Associate Reformed church, where he was soon elected and continues to serve as an acceptable elder.

March, 1863, Joseph Knox was elected elder and ordained by Rev. S. C. Alexander.

June 27th, 1863, W. J. Bowen, David H. Hart, (son of elder John Hart, and grandson of James Hart, also an elder), and Thomas N. Knox, (son of Samuel Knox, elder), were elected elders; W. J. Bowen had been an elder before and was not now ordained, the other two were ordained by Rev. John Douglas, September 18th, 1868. The present elders at Pleasant Hill church are Samuel Knox, W. J. Bowen, David H. Hart, and Thomas N. Knox.

#### DEACONS IN PLEASANT HILL.

In June, 1858, David H. Hart and Mathew Knox were elected deacons, and were the first who held that office in the Pleasant Hill church.

In 1859, F. B. McLean and Richard M. Capps were elected deacons, and ordained by Rev. J. B. Watt.

June 27th, 1863, Robert A. Walker and N. J. N. Bowen were elected deacons and ordained by Rev. John Douglas, October 25th, 1868. The deacons now serving at Pleasant





Hill, (1872) are Richard M. Capps, Robert A. Walker, and N. J. N. Bowen.

Here we cannot refrain from appending our opinion or dissent in regard to the organisation of this church, not that we have any desire to undo what has been done, but we record it as an advisory caution to other communities that may be disposed to follow their example.

Although the prospect of building up a church in that community may have been at that time encouraging, yet we cannot but think that a separate organisation was an unwise and injudicious step on the part of its projectors, and its history fully sustains us in this opinion. True, it has been repeatedly and sorely afflicted in the death and removals of many of its elders and other influential members; and by these adverse and unexpected events its growth and prosperity have no doubt been greatly crippled and retarded; yet, we believe that as a general rule, the multiplying of churches in any community, on the ground of accomodating a few who may not have within themselves the means of self-support, instead of doing good, usually ends in harm, and eventually leaves all parties in a worse and more dependent condition than they were at the outset. We by no means object to this people's having a house of worship and stated seasons of preaching; but not as a separate organised church. Better have remained under the wing of the parent church, all having the same *purse*, the same elders and deacons, and united under the same pastor.

It will not be considered a departure from the proper line of our history, for us to give some accounts of our lands and graveyard. A few years prior to the resignation of Mr. Watson the city of the dead, the old graveyard, was found to be fast filling up, and it was necessary that some provision should be made for enlarging it. Accordingly, in November, 1837, the congregation purchased of Dr. J. C. Radisill nine and three-quarters acres of land. About the same time, John W. Herron made a gift of three additional acres. This, with what they had before, amounted in all to some sixteen acres. In the year 1840, they laid off a



square piece of land on the west side of the road, (with the church between,) corresponding in size to the old graveyard, and its sides running nearly parallel with it. Like the other, it was soon enclosed in a stone wall, having an iron gate-way. The first grave opened in this yard was that of Mrs. Deborah C. Cox, wife of Samuel Cox, on the 23rd of June, 1840. Her's is not *now* a lone grave—hundreds quietly sleep around her.

FIFTH PASTOR—REV. ALBERTUS LEANDER WATTS.

In the fall of the same year, (1840,) in which Mr. Watson left this church vacant, they were supplied for a few Sabbaths by the Rev. A. L. Watts, then the pastor of Lincolnton and Long Creek churches, North Carolina. In the spring of the following year, (1841), Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill united in a call for the pastoral labors of Mr. Watts, which he accepted, and was installed their pastor at the next spring meeting of Concord Presbytery, which met that year at Steele Creek. From the unusual amount of sickness that had pervaded the congregation for a few years previous, together with the strong tide of emigration that had been taking so many to the West, the church had been considerably depleted as to its numbers, and things were not then in as promising a condition as they had been in former years; but still there was a wide and important field for ministerial labor and usefulness. Mr. Watts had enjoyed the advantage of several years' experience in the ministry, and was in the prime of life, and in the vigor of manhood. All this seemed to be an earnest of his future usefulness. In person, he was small, under the medium size, and of a feeble and delicate constitution. As a preacher, he was plain and instructive. He was seen to best advantage and was most useful in his pastoral visits, and in the chambers of the sick and afflicted. He settled on a farm, having purchased land four miles or more south of the church. We consider it very injudicious on the part of a minister where he has a choice, and unfortunate where he does so from necessity, to settle on the outskirts of his congregation—so far from the centre of his operations. This circumstance, in many instances, operates as a



serious obstacle in the way of his usefulness, very often occasions tardiness in meeting his appointments, and this fact will soon show its influence on others. Nothing is more essential to a ministers' usefulness than punctuality. Be on the spot at the time, have a fixed hour to begin, and when that hour arrives, commence, without regard to the presence or absence of this or that individual. A fixed hour and a quick start soon bring all up to it.

Mr. Watts labored in this field some eleven or twelve years in all. During portions of the time he was encouraged to believe his labors were not in vain, from the numbers that were added to the church. At other times he met with such discouragements as any minister may reasonably calculate upon who has to come in contact with "many men of many minds." Again he was in the deep waters of affliction—the very water-spouts were let in upon him, in his domestic bereavements and congregational difficulties. During the earlier years of his labors here, he was greatly aided by the counsels of a large and judicious session, until the change came. For several years in succession, the church lost an elder each year by death.

In the year 1813, on the 30th November, John McDowell died, aged sixty-nine years. He was born of pious parents. His father emigrated to this State from Pennsylvania before the Revolutionary War, and was one among the earliest settlers of this county. In early life he was a subject of converting grace, and for more than thirty years was a ruling elder in this church. He was a man of retiring habits, much interested in and strongly devoted to agricultural pursuits, and spent much of his life in active out-door employments. Though naturally of rather a delicate constitution, one very remarkable fact can be stated of him—he was never confined to his bed a whole day by sickness till the third day before his death.

July 20th, 1844, F. M. Beaty (elder) died, aged 51 years.

September 29th, 1845, James M. Sloan (elder) died, aged 42 years.

March 1st, 1846, Reuben Freeman (elder) died, aged 72 years. These are all buried at Steele Creek.



It should have been previously stated that Robert Irwin McDowell, Alexander G. Neel, and Geo. W. McDonald, were elected elders, and ordained by Mr. Watts, August 14th, 1842.

In 1845, Robert J. McDowell removed, and was dismissed to join Unity church, Lincoln county, North Carolina, where he still resides and serves as a ruling elder.

In 1846, an unfortunate occurrence took place, which greatly disturbed the peace and prosperity of the church, and ultimately impaired Mr. Watts' usefulness and was the cause of his leaving. For many years it was a fretting sore which would not be mollified, and could not be healed. "The beginning of strife is as the letting forth of water." All this trouble of years continuance grew out of an indiscretion, or ill report, circulated by one individual prejudicial to the character of Mrs. Watts. This slander, as it was generally regarded, was speedily, but rather violently avenged, by a few of the congregation. Feelings were excited, and regardless of consequences, they resorted to such means of retribution as involved them in a very unpleasant and vexatious civil prosecution. As all the parties concerned were of the same neighborhood, each had his friends and advocates. Thus things went on from bad to worse, till Mr. Watts himself became seriously involved in the difficulty. His course of conduct soon alienated some of his friends from him, relaxed their confidence in him, and in the end resulted in grave charges in respect to his ministerial character being preferred against him before Concord Presbytery. The charges there presented against him were in the following form, viz., "Of conduct, in several instances, unworthy of a Christian, and unbecoming a minister of the gospel, and well calculated to destroy the confidence of a people in their pastor." During this long and warm strife in the church, its effects were disastrous to its prosperity; there was quite an exodus of many of its influential members, and among them two ruling elders went off. One, like Noah's raven, went out to return no more—the other, like his dove, found no rest for the sole of his foot till he came back with the olive branch. It would appear as if some of





these disaffected parties only withdrew during the storm, and took shelter in some neighboring Presbyterian church till the trouble should pass over, hoping and perhaps intending then to return. Others formed connections with other denominations and remain away to this day.

With a view to investigating the charges against Mr. Watts, and to settle, if possible, the difficulty betwixt him and the congregation, Concord Presbytery met at Steele Creek church, November 24th, and continued in session till the 2nd of December, 1847. After a patient and faithful investigation, extending through eight days, finally gave the following anomalous deliverance: "*The general charge is not sustained.*" There was no censure passed on the prosecutor, but an implied approval of the course he had pursued. It was what might appropriately be called "a draw game." The result of the whole matter was what might have been most reasonably expected, the necessity of Mr. Watts' leaving Steele Creek. This he promised the Presbytery at the time of the trial he would do; but did not for several years afterwards. He continued to preach to those who were his friends and adherents till 1853. This was a year of peculiar trial and sorrow to him; but so far as the fruits of his labors were apparent, might have been called the great year of the feast. That year his connection with the church was dissolved, and on the 30th of September of the same year, he was bereft of his second wife. This double widowhood, in home and church, only tended to make his situation the more desolate and distressing. Amidst it all, and even while passing through the deep waters, cut loose, and floating out on the drift-wood of the storm, without chart or compass to point him to a haven of rest, he could say, "sorrowful yet rejoicing." In the autumn of that same year, the Rev. Daniel Baker, D. D., ("the great revivalist," as he was called), visited Steele Creek, and preached with his accustomed earnestness and zeal for a week or more, and the result of that meeting superadded to the labors of the pastors who had been sowing the seed here for years, was the addition of some forty-eight members, more than had ever been added in any one



previous year. Thus the church, though deprived of her head, was strengthened in her members. The year after Mr. Watts' pastoral connection with Steele Creek was dissolved, (1854), he spent in supplying two churches, (Unity and Six Mile Creek), in the bounds of Bethel Presbytery, South Carolina—still remaining, however, at his former home in Steele Creek, but preparing to move over and settle in the midst of his new field, when he was suddenly cut down by death, January 23d, 1855, in the 55th year of his age and the 27th of his ministry.

Previously to his leaving Steele Creek, as the session had been reduced so much by death, it was thought necessary to add to their number. Accordingly, on September 14th, 1849, an election was held, and Thomas B. Price, William B. Brown, and McKnitt A. Henderson were elected ruling elders, and with the exception of Mr. Price, who had previously been an elder at Pleasant Hill, they were ordained at the same time by Mr. Watts. So that at his removal or death the session consisted of John Hart, Wm. Clark, John Hamilton McDowell, Thomas B. Price, and Wm. P. Brown. McKnitt Henderson, died August 24th, 1850, aged 37 years.

During Mr. Watts' pastorate, and in consequence of the difficulties in the church, Jonathan Reid, an elder, withdrew from the communion of the Presbyterian church and joined the Associate Reformed church. Alexander G. Neel, an elder, took his dismissal and changed his membership to Sharon, a neighboring Presbyterian church. G. Washington McDonald, another elder, in consequence of marrying a sister of a deceased wife, was suspended from membership in the church, but after a few years was restored to its privileges as a private member, but not to his office as an elder, and is still one of us.

The following sketch of the life and labors of Mr. Watts is based on information obtained from his surviving relations, and from a memoir of him, prepared by Concord Presbytery soon after his death:

The ancestors of Rev. A. L. Watts were Scotch-Irish, and came from Pennsylvania at some period earlier than



1758. His great-grandfather settled some four miles west of where Statesville now stands. He had three sons, all of whom were active members of Concord church, and William, the younger, was one of the original elders in that church. William was born in Lancaster county, Pa., September 27, 1754. When not more than a year old his parents emigrated to North Carolina, and settled in what is now called Iredell county. On the 11th of June, 1778, William Watts was married to Rachel Davidson, by the Rev. James Hall, D. D., (this being the first couple Dr. Hall married). He served as a ruling elder in Concord church till his death, which occurred in 1818. He was buried at Statesville, as there was no graveyard connected with Concord church at that time. They raised a family of twelve children, eight sons and four daughters, all of whom became members of the church except one, and of him little is known—he removed to the west. Their father died when Albertus was not more than sixteen years old. His mother lived to the extraordinary age of *one hundred and four years*, and is buried in the same graveyard with her husband. Albertus L. Watts, the youngest son of William Watts and one of the eight brothers, was born Nov. 25th, 1801. He received his early education from different teachers in his father's neighborhood, viz., Capt. Alexander, Robert Lansenbury, and Dr. Asa Beall; father of the Rev. B. L. Beall. He went to school to Dr. Beall some three or four years. He received his academic training under the Rev. J. M. Mushatt, of the Associate Reformed church, who taught for some years in Statesville. After completing his school studies he went to Audover College, but did not stay there long; why he left we cannot say. He afterwards went to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where he graduated in 1826. He joined Concord church when the Rev. John M. Erwin was the pastor, and soon turned his attention to studying for the ministry. It may be interesting to some, and serve as an encouraging example to other Christian parents, to narrate the following incident in the life of William Watts, father of Albertus. "When his family was yet small, he, in company with one



of his neighbors, went on a trip to Pennsylvania, and when attempting to cross the Susquehanna by night, was swept from his horse by the current of the river. A short distance below he lodged on a rock, and there, waiting till his fellow traveller could procure assistance, he vowed to the Lord if he would save his life, he would educate two of his sons and dedicate them to the gospel ministry. On his return home he related the circumstance to his wife, who proposed that he should fulfil his vow by educating for the gospel ministry two very promising lads of a near neighbor. To this the father would not consent, saying that was not what he had vowed to do, and he lived to see his promise in a way of fulfilment, in the case of two of his sons, William Franklin and Albertus Leander; for though he did not live to see them enter the ministry, he lived to see them in their academic course with a view to entering that holy office. This circumstance is calculated to show the importance of Christian parents' dedicating their children to God at an early age, and not taking it for granted that any other effort on their part can release them from so sacred a duty.

How faithfully he kept his vow! How remarkably his prayer was answered! He was safely released from his perils by water, and God accepted his offering, for two of his sons were called to the work of the ministry—William Franklin and Albertus Leander—and two others were ruling elders. Albertus, soon after graduating at college, entered Union Seminary, Va., where he sat at the feet and received instructions from the Rev. John H. Rice. He was licensed to preach the gospel by Concord Presbytery, at Lincolnton, North Carolina, on the 15th of November, 1823.

For a short time after this, he preached to his own people at Concord; afterwards he served the churches at Buffalo and Briar Creek, Virginia; thence he removed into the bounds of Orange Presbytery, and preached for some time at Halifax Court House; then removed to the county of Granville, where he preached steadily to the church of Nutbush. About this time he married Mary Williams. This happy relation, however, like a dream or vision of the night, did not last long, for she died of scarlet fever, three





months after their marriage. Soon after this he returned into the bounds of Concord Presbytery, and by invitation settled at Rutherford and Little Britain. About the year 1835, the Synod of North Carolina, divided, or rather set off a portion of Concord Presbytery into a new Presbytery, to be called "The Morganton Presbytery." It will be seen from the minutes that this new Presbytery did meet at Morganton, in April, 1836, and there the Rev. A. L. Watts was received into it. At the same meeting a call was presented to him from the church of Lincolnton, which he accepted, and he was installed its pastor on the 29th of July, 1836. After laboring there four or five years, giving a portion of his time to Long Creek church, he received a call in the year 1841, from the united churches of Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill to become their pastor, which he accepted and was soon after installed. In 1843 he was married to his second wife, Sarah D. McMillan, of Fayetteville, North Carolina, by whom he had four children—one son and three daughters. His son, Charles Lewis, studied medicine, graduated in New York, and after practicing there a few years, died December 20th, 1871, aged 25 years, and he is there buried among strangers. Only one daughter now survives. Little Mary sleeps in our graveyard; the other sister was buried in Fayetteville. Mrs. Sarah D. Watts died September 30th, 1853, and is buried at Steele Creek.

During the time of Mr. Watts' ministry at Steele Creek, the following persons were elected, and by him ordained deacons, viz., S. Jefferson Berryhill, John L. Jamison, Alexander F. Sadler, William M. Porter, and Robert W. McDowell. These were the first deacons that were ever elected in this church.

Mr. Watts died, as before stated, January 23rd, 1855, and is buried with our dead at Steele Creek, where his bones quietly slumber beside his wife and little Mary. He is now where the weary rest, and where all disputes are unheard, and unkind feelings buried forever.

It will not be forgotten that the last act of kindness and respect he received from his brethren in the ministry, was



their making him the Moderator of the Synod of North Carolina, which met at Concord, October, 1854, the fall previous to his death. And while many were anticipating the pleasure of hearing his opening sermon the next fall, nine months before the time appointed for the meeting of Synod, his lips had been sealed in death. We know not that any of his writings were ever published, except a sermon on "The Final Perseverance of the Saints."

REV. ANDREW M. WATSON.—STATED SUPPLY.

After the resignation of Rev. A. L. Watts, the church was for a few years without a pastor, though not destitute of preaching and the stated means of grace. From March of the year 1854, to the beginning of the ensuing year, they were supplied by the Rev. Andrew M. Watson, a native of York district, S. C., and cousin of the Rev. S. L. Watson. He had been a missionary for some years among the Indians of the West, and returned home about this time. He remained only till the end of the year. He still lives, and is now the pastor of Portersville church, in the Presbytery of Memphis.

REV. SAMUEL WILLIAMSON, D. D.—STATED SUPPLY.

The following year, (1855), from January to November, they were supplied by the Rev. Samuel Williamson, D. D., who had been President of Davidson College, and a short time previous to this had resigned his office. He was a member of Concord Presbytery. That fall he concluded to remove west, and settled in Arkansas. He still lives in that State, advanced in years, but is the pastor of the Washington church.

THE SIXTH PASTOR.—THE REV. GEORGE DICKISON PARKS.

A very few months after Dr. Samuel Williamson ceased to labor as the supply of Steele Creek church, on the 1st of January, 1856, the congregation, through the influence of a few of the members of Pleasant Hill church, was induced to invite Dr. G. D. Parks, then a licentiate, to come and supply them. He was a native of this county, and under the care of Concord Presbytery, but was little known in Steele Creek. He had spent some short time prac-



ticing medicine a few years previous, in the bounds of Pleasant Hill congregation. He accepted this invitation and entered at once upon his labors. For several years prior to this, the church had been in a disturbed and somewhat divided condition, arising out of the dissensions with their last pastor. Dr. Parks' great aim was, as far as possible, to heal this schism, and reunite and gather in the scattered flock. During his first year's labor he received the signal and encouraging marks of the Divine favor and blessing, a deep and extensive religious interest was soon produced and kept up for months, and larger accessions were made to the church that year than during any previous year since its organisation, between fifty and sixty members being added to it. By this means healing oil was poured on the troubled waters, and they began to flow quietly once more within their accustomed banks. He succeeded in winning the esteem and confidence of the congregation, so that before the year was out, he was with great unanimity elected pastor of the church. But soon after he was ordained and installed, he found that the labors necessary to be performed were too arduous for his physical abilities. As a necessary consequence his pastorate was short, not exceeding two years and a half. He resigned his charge and left in May, 1858.

GEORGE DICKISON PARKS was born in Mecklenburg county, in the bounds of Providence congregation, where he was also reared. He received his primary education at different schools in the neighborhood of his father's. He pursued his academic and classical studies mainly under the instruction of the Rev. Cyrus Johnston, D. D., who for several years had charge of the academy at Providence church, and supplied their pulpit at the same time. In the year 1845, he entered Davidson College, and graduated in 1848. It was during his college course that he made a profession of religion and united with the church. Not long after leaving college he commenced reading medicine with E. Dallas Williamson, M. D., in the same county, and attended one course of lectures in Kentucky, in 1850; but did not return nor receive a diploma, for reasons that will be



afterwards stated. Under a permit, however, he undertook to practice medicine for a short time—in this way he obtained his title of “Doctor”—*Medicinae Doctor*—not D. D., or *Divinitatis Doctor*. In 1851, he was united in marriage to Miss Margaret Elizabeth, daughter of William Ross of the same county, a ruling elder in Sharon church. This union did not last much more than a year, for she was prematurely cut down by death, and he was left in widowed solitude to brood over his incurable wound. This heavy blow, so crushing and “grievous to be borne,” was, however, so tempered and overruled by providence, as to prove to be the starting point of an entirely new career with Dr. Parks. His mind about this time began to be seriously exercised on the subject of the gospel ministry. He felt it to be his duty to preach the gospel. Now all his former half-matured, undeveloped plans, and unfinished studies had to be abandoned, and he commenced the study of Theology preparatory to the ministry. With the view of carrying out his new plans, in the early part of the year 1853, he went to the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C. But after remaining there a few months he returned home, and prosecuted his studies privately with such aid as was available to him. While thus engaged he was united in marriage to Miss Amelia Ann, daughter of Mr. Neel M. Stitt, a ruling elder in Providence church, within the bounds of which he had been reared. This, like his former marriage, only lasted for a few years, for he was again bereaved by her early removal by death, and he was left with one little daughter, (too young to realise her loss), the only living link betwixt him and his beloved dead. He was licensed to preach the gospel by Concord Presbytery, in the spring of 1856. A few months afterwards he was invited to supply the churches of Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill. After a short trial, his labors proving acceptable and profitable, these churches united in a joint call for his pastoral services. Having accepted it, he was, on the 14th of June, 1856, ordained and installed their pastor. This was the beginning of his labors, and his first pastoral charge. He purchased, and





settled a place some five miles south of the church—the same plantation on which his predecessor had lived.

Here we cannot refrain from entering our dissent from such selections of homes on the part of pastors. In every case it may not be a matter of choice; in some it is a necessity. But duty, interest, and efficiency, all require that he should be as near the centre of his labors as practicable. This, in our opinion, contributes not a little to his usefulness, while a different course may very seriously interfere with or impede it. Though Dr. Parks labored for a time in this wide and important field with encouraging success, he soon found his physical strength inadequate to the full and faithful discharge of the duties required. He did not remain long before he felt constrained to resign his charge, and the church was declared vacant in May, 1853. He removed from this field to Henderson county, North Carolina, where he hoped, with lighter labor and the benefit of a more salubrious climate, he would soon recuperate and be fitted for full duty. His health did improve, and he remained there a few years, when he received and accepted a call to Third Creek church, Rowan county, where he ministered only for a few years. In 1860, he was united in marriage to Miss Mary Margaret, eldest daughter of Dr. William McLean, a ruling elder in Unity church, Lincoln county, North Carolina. In 1867 he was invited to supply Sugar Creek church, in Mecklenburg county, one of the oldest and most important churches in the State or Synod of North Carolina. He had not completed a year's labor there, when the congregation united in and made out a unanimous call for his pastoral services, which he accepted, in the spring of 1868. On the 6th of June of the same year he was installed pastor by the Rev. Daniel A. Penick, Sr., and Rev. John Douglas, where he still remains their much esteemed and acceptable pastor, but in feeble and precarious health.

During his pastorate at Steele Creek church, in the year 1858, the following persons were elected and ordained ruling elders, viz., Alexander G. Neel, who had previously been an elder, but during the troublous times with Rev.



A. L. Watts he had withdrawn from the communion of this church, and transferred his membership to Sharon, a neighboring church. After remaining away several years, he returned as a private member to Steele Creek, where after a few years he was, "by a spontaneous and almost unanimous vote of the congregation," re-elected an elder. At the same time, B. F. Brown and S. Jefferson Berryhill were elected elders and ordained by Dr. Parks, January 24th, of the same year, (1858). John Hart, an elder in Steele Creek, but residing near Pleasant Hill church, found it more convenient to transfer his membership to that church, and before the termination of the year, he was elected an elder there. He died June 1st, 1863, aged 71 years, and is buried at Pleasant Hill church. In the same year, (1858), Allen H. Brown and James S. Collins were elected, and by Dr. Parks, ordained deacons in Steele Creek church.

The congregation finding that their church edifice had attained a "gray old age," and needed repairs, resolved to build a new house. Accordingly a subscription was opened and circulated through the congregation, and the necessary amount was soon raised. Having sold to T. N. Spratt, some six or seven acres of their church lands, lying on the west side of the main road leading past the church, with the view of obtaining a more eligible site for their new church, they purchased of Mrs. E. M. Herron, and her son Dr. J. W. Herron, seven acres on the opposite, or east side of the road, making their lands about the same as they were before they sold any. The contract of building the new house was given to John J. Wilson, a member of the church, who, according to the prescribed plan, soon erected and completed a large and capacious framed building, seventy-two by fifty feet, all finished in a faithful and workmanlike manner—a house corresponding in every way with the wants and liberality of the congregation, capable of seating one thousand persons. The pulpit is in the east end, a vestibule of twelve feet in front, galleries on both sides running all the way, and one across the end in front, with two doors, the only outlets in the west end, opening into the vestibule, where all are discharged through one



larger door ; three large windows in the pulpit end—one of stained glass—and five on each of the two sides both above and below, twenty in all, and two below and three above on the west end—all neatly painted within and without. It was completed at a cost not exceeding four thousand dollars, and promptly paid for nearly as soon as the work was finished.

Since the church's last purchase of lands, the congregation has ceded away two small lots on opposite sides of the church, not exceeding one quarter of an acre in each, one to the Rev. John Douglas, and the other to Dr. J. W. Herron—merely to straighten their lines and for the sake of appearance—leaving the church still in the possession of sixteen acres. You now approach the new church from the main road by a gradual ascent, on the same side with the old one, and about one hundred and fifty yards distant from it. It stands on a commanding eminence, in the midst of a forest of native oaks, overlooking with maternal care its two large graveyards, where many of its dead sleep. It is beautiful for situation, with surroundings undulating, within sound of the river's roar, and from its top several mountain peaks may be seen looming up in the distance. May it long stand as a centre of influence, a defence of the truth, a nursery of piety, where many shall be born into the kingdom, and out of which shall annually issue streams to gladden the city of our God.

THE SEVENTH PASTOR—THE REV. JAMES BELL WATT.

The August succeeding the resignation and removal of Dr. Parks, (1858), Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill churches united in a call to the Rev. James B. Watt, (who for several years previous had been pastor of a neighboring Associate Reformed church), to become their pastor, which he accepted. Mr. Watt had for some time previous to this, felt pressed in conscience in reference to the restricted communion of his church, and had determined to withdraw from it and return to the Presbyterian church, in whose pale he had been reared, and with which his parents were connected, and which he himself had joined in early life. Having signified his willingness to accept this call, and having transferred his membership from the First Presbytery of the As-



sociate Reformed Church, to Concord Presbytery, he was accordingly, on the 9th of September, 1858, installed pastor of these two united churches, which he served acceptably and faithfully till removed by death, which, in the mysterious providence of God, occurred in the short space of two years after his entering upon this new field of labor.

JAMES B. WATT was born April 4th, 1820, in Fairfield district, South Carolina, in the bounds of Horeb (Presbyterian) church, of which his parents were members. His early education was obtained from different teachers in the neighborhood of his father's. His academic studies, as far as he prosecuted them, were pursued at Mt. Zion College, Winnsboro, S. C., under the tuition of J. W. Hudson, Esq., who had there for many years kept up and sustained a large and flourishing school, where many young men were prepared for college, and educated for usefulness in life. While pursuing his classical studies, at the age of nineteen Mr. Watt entered into a matrimonial engagement, and was married on the 31st of December, 1839, to Miss Nancy M., daughter of Charles Bell, Esq. This step necessarily arrested his course of studies for the time. Previous to this he had joined the Presbyterian church at Horeb, of which the Rev. Wm. Brearley was then the state supply in connection with the church in Winnsboro. The family into which he married was connected with the Associate Reformed church. Soon after his marriage, from some motive or influence unknown to us, he was induced to change his church relations, and unite with the Associate Reformed body. Having prior to this, and now more strongly and sensibly than ever felt it to be his duty to preach the gospel, he determined again to take up his books and resume his studies. He now had a wife and one child, and with these he repaired to Due West, the only college of his Church South. He entered upon an irregular course of study, spending there the greater part of the years of 1841 and 1842, pursuing only such branches as he felt would be most useful to him in the profession he had adopted for life. He did not graduate nor receive a diploma. After thus completing his college studies, he remained at the same place





for a year or more, prosecuting his Theological studies under the Rev. E. E. Pressly, D. D., after which he returned home and studied privately, till either in the fall of 1843, or spring of 1844, he was by the First Presbytery of the Associate Reformed Church licensed to preach the gospel.

In 1844 he received a call to become the pastor of the united churches of Little Steele Creek and Sardis. Having accepted, he was ordained and installed in November, 1844, and, as before stated, he remained in harmony with these people, and labored as their faithful and acceptable pastor, till the change came over him, and he decided to leave the communion of that church. In 1858 he resigned the pastorate of these two churches, and having united with the Presbyterian church, accepted the call to Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill churches, and was installed their pastor at the time above stated.

On the 10th of April, 1854, his wife, Nancy M., who lingered long, and had been a great sufferer, was removed by death, leaving him with three little children, having previously lost one or two, who quietly sleep by their mother's side in Steele Creek graveyard. In July following of the same year, he was united in marriage to Miss Louisa Angeline, youngest daughter of Gen. Wm. H. and Hannah Neel, of Mecklenburg county, N. C., and members of Steele Creek church. He purchased and settled a place some three miles east of the church. His ministry in this new and important field did not continue long—not more than two years. He was soon cut down and early gathered with the fathers.

Mr. Watt, as described to us by one who knew him long and intimately, was tall and slender, a man of much personal dignity, of great suavity of manner, of ardent piety, a good preacher, fluent and impressive, though not boisterous. He died September 16th, 1860, in the fortieth year of his age, and the sixteenth of his ministry. He is buried in Steele Creek graveyard, where he quietly rests in the full hope of a blessed immortality. He left a stricken and bereaved widow and six children to mourn their loss—two



sons and a daughter by his former marriage, (one of his sons died during the war—the other son and daughter are married, and live in Texas), and three sons by his last marriage. Truly, God's ways are inscrutable! "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." "Be still and know that I am God."

THE EIGHTH PASTOR.—THE REV SAMUEL CAROTHERS  
ALEXANDER.

In the month of June, 1861, the year succeeding the death of Mr. Watt, the church invited a young man from the Theological Seminary, Columbia, S. C., to come and supply them for a day, which he promised to do; but being providentially hindered from meeting his appointment, he procured as his substitute, the services of Mr. S. C. Alexander, then a licentiate under the care of Charleston Presbytery, South Carolina. He came on the day appointed and supplied the pulpit in the place of his friend. This circumstance prepared the way, and was the occasion of Mr. Alexander's being invited to supply the pulpit, and subsequently to become the pastor of this church. The same fall, he having been transferred from the care of Charleston to Concord Presbytery, North Carolina, the churches of Steele Creek and Pleasant Hill united in a call for his pastoral labors, which he accepted, and was ordained and installed December 20th, 1861. The year following, (1862), he was united in marriage with Miss Nancy Rebecca, eldest daughter of Thos. B. Price, one of the elders in Steele Creek church. He purchased a place some five miles distant from the church, and about midway betwixt this and Pleasant Hill. He did not labor here long before a difficulty sprang up betwixt him and a portion of the Steele Creek congregation, which waxing worse and worse, finally ended in the church's applying to Presbytery, for a dissolution of the pastoral relation, after there had been a good deal of excitement, dissension, and hard feeling in the church. The Presbytery in December, 1865, dissolved his connection with Steele Creek, the other church continuing to receive his services a little longer. Steele Creek was then declared vacant.



It will be seen that his connection with this church was neither long nor prosperous, and for the greater portion of the time it could not have been pleasant to him. He did not immediately remove from the neighborhood, but remained at his former home—preaching to the blacks. Not long after this, he changed his ecclesiastical connections, he and two other ministers of like idiosyncrasies, without the aid, authority, or sanction of any Synod, met at Bethany church, six miles southeast of Statesville, Iredell county, N. C., and there declared themselves “The Catawba Presbytery,” and this, some three weeks before there was a church organised or so much as a single member enrolled, to be represented in or by this anomalous Presbytery. But in a few years, nearly all the blacks belonging to the adjacent churches were decoyed from them, and organised into churches which subsequently fell into or joined “The Catawba Presbytery.” After laboring a year or two in this irregular and revolutionary way Mr. Alexander removed from his country home to Charlotte; and there opened a school under the direction and patronage of the Freedman’s Bureau, for the education of the blacks, and this school may be regarded as the incipient step, or beginning of what afterwards resulted in the founding of “The Biddle Institute.” Mr. Alexander was active and diligent in procuring funds for the erection of this institute, and even took one of the large building contracts; and after the buildings were completed, he was for a time engaged as one of the teachers in the institute. Why he left we have not been able to ascertain. In the year 1871 he removed from Charlotte, N. C., and returned to his native home in western Pennsylvania, where he still lives and labors as a minister of the gospel. Of his early antecedents, we know but little. His primary education was received in his native State. Two years of his college course were spent at Danville, Ky., and a third year was spent at Jefferson College, Pa., where he graduated. In the winter of 1858 or 1859 he came South, and entered the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C. In the spring of his second year at the Seminary, April 8th, 1860, at Adam’s Run church,



he was licensed by Charleston Presbytery to preach the gospel. In the fall of that year he returned to the Seminary, and the following May completed the regular prescribed course. A month afterwards, as above stated, he visited Steele Creek church, and settled here as a pastor. His connection with this church did not continue but a little over four years. The elders and deacons remained the same as when he came among them, and there was but little change in the membership of the church.

NINTH PASTOR.—THE REV. JOHN DOUGLAS.

Almost simultaneously with the dismissal or removal of Mr. Alexander, the congregation of Steele Creek invited the Rev. John Douglas, (the present incumbent), then a member of Charleston Presbytery, S. C., an entire stranger to the church, to come and supply their pulpit one Sabbath. This invitation was accepted, but not immediately complied with; it was, however, after the lapse of a few weeks. His first visit and sermon at Steele Creek church, was on the 19th of November, 1865. The result of that visit was a request to supply the pulpit for the remainder of the year, and then to continue with them during the succeeding year, (1866). About the close of the year, 1865, Mr. Alexander had his connection with Pleasant Hill church dissolved, and then that congregation united with Steele Creek in a request to Mr. Douglas to supply them for the ensuing year. Before the expiration of that year, (1866), these two churches presented before Concord Presbytery a call for his pastoral labors. He having been previously dismissed from Charleston Presbytery to join Concord, was received as a member of the same, at Providence church, Mecklenburg county, on the 3d of May, 1866. This call was made out by these two churches during the month of September, and presented at the fall sessions of Presbytery, which were held at Morganton; but Mr. Douglas being providentially hindered from attending that meeting, it was held over for further consideration and decision till the next spring meeting. It was then placed in his hands, and having signified his willingness to accept, arrangements were made for his installation. He was accordingly installed on Saturday, the





6th July, 1867. The Rev. Robert B. Anderson preached the sermon from Hebrews xi, 1; the Rev. Walter W. Pharr presided and gave the charge to the pastor; and Rev. G. D. Parks gave the charge to the people.

From this time his pastoral labors began, and a wide and important field was presented for his culture and labors. During the first year, encouraging success attended his efforts. In addition to the ordinary pastoral services, a protracted meeting was held at Steele Creek, commencing on the 28th of September, 1866, and continuing through nine days, in which he was aided mainly by the Rev. Robert Nall, D. D., of Alabama. The result of that year's labor was an addition of some fifty members to the two churches to which he was ministering. From that time to the present, (now six years), things have gone on in peace and harmony, evincing such a degree of outward prosperity and success, as encourages us to feel that our labor has not been in vain in the Lord. During this period of six years above one hundred and seventy-five additions have been made to this pastoral charge, an average of nearly thirty members a year. One hundred and seventy baptisms have been performed, and the Sabbath-school, conducted by the pastor, elders, deacons, and other members of the church, has numbered above one hundred and seventy-five scholars. The benevolent contributions of the church have been increased—raised according to the weekly system, "each one laying by him in store as the Lord has prospered him." In this we praise not, nor feel any vain glorying, either because the congregation in "their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality," or have come up to, or transcended their resources. The church now numbers about three hundred and fifty communicants. As a general rule they are very punctual in attending public worship and all the ordinances of the Sabbath and sanctuary.

On the 8th day of May, 1869, William Henry Clark, John Silas Watts, and Andrew Parks Price, were elected deacons in Steele Creek church. After due consideration of the subject, and having signified their willingness to accept, they were, on the first day of August, of the same



year, ordained by Mr. Douglas, and set apart to the full duties of their office. In the month of January, 1870, S. Jefferson Berryhill, a ruling elder in this church, took his dismissal and removed to Tennessee, where he still lives. On the 20th of April, of the same year, (1870), John Hamilton McDowell, another ruling elder in this church, was removed by death, aged sixty-three years, and is buried in Steele Creek graveyard.

The officers at Steele Creek church at present, (1872), are—

1. *Pastor*—Rev. John Douglas.
2. *Ruling Elders*—William Clark, Thomas B. Price, William P. Brown, Alexander G. Neel, and Benjamin F. Brown.
3. *Deacons*—Robert W. McDowell, Alexander F. Sadler, Allen H. Brown, James S. Collins, William H. Clark, John Silas Watts, and Andrew Parks Price.
4. *Church Members*—Three hundred and fifty.
5. *The Number of Families*—About two hundred.

We have now cursorily gone over and surveyed the field of our research, and have honestly endeavored to collect and make out as full and correct a history of this church as our limited materials would allow. We pretend not to say that it is either full or perfect, but enough has been collected to preserve it from utter oblivion. We have given a brief and general outline of it from its organisation in 1760 to the present time, with a short sketch of the life and labors of each of its nine pastors and different stated supplies—of its twenty-nine ruling elders and ten deacons. Now, after a few general remarks, we will wipe our pen and lay it down.

In the first place, we acknowledge our great indebtedness to the *grave-stones* in our burying ground for the amount of information and authentic history they have furnished us. In Steele Creek graveyard will be found buried among our dead the remains of six ministers of the gospel, who, "being dead, yet speaketh." Of these, three were pastors of this church, viz., Rev. Dr. Humphrey Hunter, Rev. Albertus L. Watts, and Rev. James B. Watt; and three of



the Associate Church, viz., Rev. Alexander Moore, and Rev. Messrs. James and Francis Pringle. It is an interesting and somewhat remarkable fact, that nearly every one of those who have been elected and served as elders in this church in years gone by, have remained with us till death, and their dust now mingles with our dead.

Another very remarkable but humiliating fact, connected with the history of this congregation is, that out of so many pious parents, and young men who were professors of religion, generally correct and exemplary in their lives, strict and punctual attendants upon the services of the sanctuary, habitual readers of the Word of God, that out of so many, God should have called so few to the work of the ministry. From a church, which, in point of numbers, is exceeded by few in the Synod, of all those born and reared in her bosom, so far as our information goes, we find but two who have devoted themselves to the work of the ministry. One finished his labors and passed away in the early part of this century—the other has just buckled on the harness as a licentiate, and entered the great harvest field of his Master. So far as our agency in this good work has gone, well may we exclaim with the prophet, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto us!” Can it be that in the production of ministers we are the century plant that blossoms but once in a hundred years? Surely this church which has had an existence so long, and enjoyed the labors of so many different pastors furnished by the church, called by us on our own election, all ready to enter on our work, should feel that this is not only capital borrowed, but a debt upon which the interest has been accruing for upwards of one hundred years. How can we redeem it! By dedicating our sons and daughters to the service of the Lord.

That our ecclesiastical field may not appear so utterly sterile, we may be allowed to mention a few extenuating facts, by way of redeeming or retrieving ourselves from the imputation of the *odium theologicum*. What then have we done, or attempted to do, in the way of raising young men for the gospel ministry? One young man of this congregation, after graduating at college, did put himself



under the care of Presbytery as a candidate for the ministry, but in consequence of ill-health, some bronchial affection, which he thought would disqualify him for being a public speaker, afterward abandoned the idea, but has for many years served as, and is now a ruling elder. What is still more remarkable, in following out the history of all those who were born among us, but removed to other parts of the country, we do not hear of more than three or four who became ministers of the gospel. Of these it may not be amiss to speak with some particularity, to mention their names, and state where their lots were cast.

JOHN ALLISON, the fourth son of Andrew and Margaret Allison, (who had ten children in all—seven sons and three daughters); was born in the bounds of Steele Creek congregation. John, when a boy, was said to have been fond of his books, apt to learn, and very anxious to obtain a liberal education; and often expressed, in early life, a desire that he might be prepared to enter the ministry. But he had no means of obtaining an education, and his father was not able to assist him. A generous neighbor, and ruling elder of the church, (Capt. Hugh Parks), kindly offered to educate him. This offer the father strangely declined to accept, and for no other reason, as he stated, than that it would elevate this son above his other children, and he wished no distinctions to be made in his family. The consequence was, John grew up like the other children, with very little education, married and settled down in life. After they had two children, he concluded to remove to Tennessee. There he still felt, and was often heard to express the desire to enter upon the work of the ministry. The Presbytery, (a "New Light,") in whose bounds his lot was cast, learning something of his views and feelings and long cherished hopes on this subject, did "take him up," and assisted him in obtaining an education, and he afterwards became a minister of the gospel. He never united with the body that educated him, but remained a Presbyterian. Of his after history, we know nothing. Steele Creek can claim no credit for what he was, or what he became, beyond the mere fact that it gave him his birth.





Another case in which this church not only claims the birth but the training of one who did actually enter the ministry, is that of Lyeon D. Parks, eldest son of Capt. Hugh Parks, who studied divinity and was licensed in 1813 or 1814 to preach the gospel. He soon after went south, and during the early part of his ministry, we find that several places in lower Georgia were occupied by him. Afterwards he moved over into the lower part of South Carolina, and settling near old Dorchester, he preached there and also at Walterboro, and near Wilton. These were Independent congregations. In 1815 or 1816, he had a misunderstanding with a portion of the Dorchester congregation, of what nature or to what extent it was carried, we have no means of ascertaining. The result, however, was that after preaching a very severe "farewell sermon" he left them. For some cause unknown to us, (unless it was that Presbyterianism was too strict for him), he withdrew from the Presbyterian Church and joined the "Congregational Association of Ministers of South Carolina" residing in and around Charleston. After this, for a time, he was a resident of St. Bartholomews Parish, S. C., acting as a missionary or itinerant preacher in connection with that body. In 1819 or 1820, he married the widow of Mr. William Hayne, and settled on a plantation not far from Walterboro. A few years before his death he withdrew from the Association, for what cause or with what body he afterwards connected himself, we have not been able to ascertain. *Fama Ulamosa* assigned many reasons, and has charged him with joining the Unitarian Church. But after the most careful investigation we can give the subject, and from the testimony of the most reliable authorities we have consulted, our deliberate conclusion is that there is no good ground for these allegations. The rumor or suspicion most likely grew out of this circumstance: when the Rev. Samuel Gilman, (a Unitarian minister), was to be ordained in the city of Charleston, there were not a sufficient number of his own sect to constitute a court competent to perform his ordination services. Hence this "Association" of which Mr. Parks was a member, were invited to take part in the



ordination services—which invitation, every one except Mr. Parks peremptorily declined to accept. The whole Association decidedly disapproved of his course, and censured him for it; and may even have gone so far as to attempt to discipline him for it. This, probably, was the reason why he withdrew from that body. His conduct on this occasion was afterward the cause of a warm and somewhat protracted newspaper controversy betwixt himself and the Rev. B. M. Palmer, Sr., D. D. Nowhere, however, in this controversy does Dr. Palmer accuse Mr. Parks of being a Unitarian, or even tainted with their sentiments; but he blames him for uniting in or aiding in doing what his conscience disapproved, and what was contrary to the creed he had sworn to maintain and defend. Another circumstance we mention which goes farther to exonerate him from the charge of Unitarianism. Not many months before his death, he was sent for by a neighbor, who himself was on his death bed, and wished the presence and prayers of a minister of the gospel. As he approached the bedside the dying sufferer thus addressed him: "Mr. Parks, I am a dying man, and I wish prayers of mercy for me before I go. Tell me frankly and openly: do you believe in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Are you a firm believer in the adorable Trinity?" To which he replied, "To you, a dying man, I aver my solemn belief in the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "Then," said the dying man, "kneel down, and pray for my soul." Mr. Parks died early, short of middle life, either in 1822 or 1823, and is buried at "Hayne Hall" near Bethel church, St. Paul's Parish, S. C.

WILLIAM MCKNIGHT was born in Steele Creek congregation in 1827. His father died when he was quite young, and left him heir to a small estate. He was left to the care, perhaps the guardianship, of his grand-uncle, Neely, who removed when William was quite young, to the West, and where by the proper husbanding of young McKnight's estate, was enabled to give him a good education. He became a minister of the gospel. But where he preached, how long, or when he died, we have had no means of know-



ing, nor do we know anything of his subsequent history.

JOHN FRANKLIN WATSON, son of the Rev. Samuel L. Watson, was born in Steele Creek congregation; but his father left here, and moved into York district, S. C., before John was two years old. He became a minister but received no part of his education or religious training in this church. His ministerial life, labors, and death, will be found recorded in the previous part of this history.

Thus the mysterious and extraordinary fact is brought home to us, that of all whom God has brought into this church during the past century, only two of our young men have felt themselves called to the work of the ministry. And to do full justice to our history, it is but fair to state that as few comparatively, have entered either of the other learned professions; more, perhaps, have devoted themselves to the Healing Art. What plausible or satisfactory reason can be assigned for these things? It was not owing to the want of intelligence, morality, or pecuniary means on the part of our people; nor to any aversion or unwillingness on the part of parents for their sons to be ministers. In our judgment, it is mainly attributable to one fact, and that is a most lamentable and culpable neglect. At no time since the organisation of this church, has there been anywhere in the bounds of the congregation, anything like energetic efforts made to establish and keep up a first-class classical school, where young men of every rank could obtain an education that would fit them for the duties and professions of life.

"'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis 'tis true."

One thing should be recorded to Steele Creek's credit—our good church music. For years past it has been excelled by few churches in all the land for good vocal music. Schools are regularly taught by competent teachers and all classes well drilled in the rules and principles of singing.

We will not, however, dwell longer on the dark side of this picture; but throw the mantle of charity over our many faults and short-comings, and hope that there may be a brighter and more prosperous future in reserve for us. When we shall wipe the dust from our feet, shake the



slumber from our eyes, kindle our apathy into a fiery zeal, "the little one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." And it shall be said to Steele Creek's praise, "when the Lord writeth up the people, This and that man was born there." "Her how ahode in strength, and the arms of her hands were made strong by the hand of the mighty God of Jacob."

"Therefore I wish that peace may still  
Within thy walls remain,  
And ever may thy palaces  
Prosperity retain,"

—Ps. 122.

And great multitudes be seen flocking to her as doves to their windows—her numbers and influence largely increased and widely extended, and God shall call from her most sacred fold, many of her consecrated sons to become heralds of the cross, and go forth to proclaim, "the glad tidings of the kingdom of God," to every creature, and when it will be seen that from STEELE CREEK CHURCH, living streams shall perennially flow out to fertilise and gladden the city of our God.

The fruits thereof "Shall shake like Lebanon." "Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." And it shall prove.

"When God makes up his last account  
Of nations in His holy mount,  
'Twill be an honor to appear  
As one new-born and nourished here."

—Ps. 87.

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